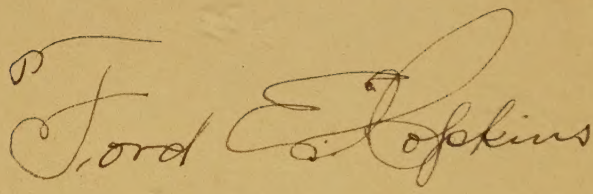
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS SERGEANTS

H. IRVING HANCOCK

THE BOYS OF THE ARMY SERIES



"Hey, You Idiot!" Howled Hinkey.

Frontispiece.

Uncle Sam's Boys As Sergeants

OR

Handling Their First Real Commands

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks, Uncle Sam's Boys on Field Duty, Uncle Sam's Boys in the Philippines, The Motor Boat Club Series, The High School Boys' Series, The West Point Series, The Annapolis Series, The Young Engineers' Series, Etc.

Illustrated

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Uncle Sam's Boys as Sergeants

CHAPTER I

"TIPPED OFF" BY WIG-WAG

LIEUTENANT POPE, battalion adjutant of the first battalion of the Thirty-fourth United States Infantry, looked up from his office desk as the door swung open and a smart, trim-looking young corporal strode in.

Pausing before the desk, the young corporal came to a precise, formal salute. Then, dropping his right hand to his side, the soldier stood at attention.

"Good morning, Corporal Overton."

"Good morning, sir."

"What do you wish?"

"I have been making inquiries, sir," continued Corporal Hal Overton, "and I am informed that you have some signaling flags among the quartermaster's stores."

"I believe I have," nodded Lieutenant Pope.

"I have come to ask, sir, if I may borrow a couple of the flags."

"Borrow? Then, Corporal, I take it that you do not want the flags for duty purposes?"

"Not immediately for duty purposes, sir. Corporal Terry and myself would like to practise at wig-wagging until we become reasonably expert. Sergeant Hupner is an expert at wig-wagging, I understand."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Lieutenant Pope heartily. "Even in the Signal Corps of the Army there are few better signalmen than the sergeant."

"So I understand, sir. Corporal Terry and I are delighted at the idea of having the sergeant instruct us."

"But what do you want to do, especially, with flag signaling?" inquired the quartermaster.

"It is simply, sir, that we want to make ourselves better soldiers."

"It is rarely that we find better soldiers than Terry and yourself," replied the quartermaster, with a friendly smile. "But you are quite right, none the less. A soldier can never know too much of military duties. I see no objection whatever to your having the flags, but as they are not a matter of ordinary issue, I think it better for me to seek Major Silsbee's authority for issuing them."

"Would it have been better if I had gone to the battalion commander in the first place, sir?"

"No; whenever you wish anything in the Army it is usually better to go direct to the officer who has that thing in charge in his department, save when it is something that you are expected to draw through your company officers."

"It was Captain Cortland who sent me to you, sir, but he said he had no authority to draw a requisition for signal flags."

"You have taken the right course, Corporal. If Major Silsbee is in his office it will take but a moment more."

While the young corporal remained at attention Lieutenant Pope turned to his telephone and called for the battalion commander.

"It's all right, Corporal," nodded the lieutenant, hanging up the receiver. Then he wrote on a slip of official paper. "Here is an order on which the quartermaster sergeant will issue you two signal flags. You are, of course, responsible for the flags, or for the value."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Five minutes later Corporal Hal Overton stepped briskly from the building in which the quartermaster's stores were kept. Under his left arm he carried two signal flags, rolled and attached to short staffs.

"Noll hasn't shown up yet. I hope he won't be long," murmured Hal, gazing across the

parade grounds in the direction of the barracks of enlisted men. "Bunkie and I have a lot to do to-day."

Readers of the preceding volumes in this series will need no introduction to Corporals Hal Overton and Noll Terry, of the Thirty-fourth United States Infantry.

The headquarters battalion to which these two earnest young soldiers were attached was still stationed at Fort Clowdry. Readers of "Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks" are familiar with the circumstances under which Overton and Terry first enlisted at a recruiting office in New York City. These same readers also know how the two young soldiers put in several weeks of steady drilling at a recruit rendezvous near New York, where they learned the first steps in the soldier's strenuous calling. Our readers are also familiar with all the many things that happened during that period of recruit instruction, and how Hal and Noll, while traveling through the Rockies on their way to join their regiment, aided in resisting an attempt by robbers to hold up the United States mail train. Our readers are well aware of all the exciting episodes of that first garrison life, including the life and death fight that Hal Overton had with thieves while he was on sentry duty in officers' row, and of the efforts of one worth-

less character in the battalion to discredit and disgrace the service of both splendid but new young soldiers.

In the second volume, "Uncle Sam's Boys on Field Duty," our readers were admitted to equally exciting scenes of a wholly different nature. This volume dealt largely with the troops while away in rough country, under practical instruction in the actual duties of soldiers in the field in war time. Just how soldiers learn the grim business of war was most fully set forth in this volume. Among other hosts of entertaining incidents our readers will recall how Hal, on scouting duty, robbed the "enemy's" outpost of rifles, canteens and secured even the corporal's shoes. Some of Hal's and Noll's other brilliant scouting successes are therein told, and it is described how Hal and Noll finally gained the information that resulted in their own side gaining the victory in the mimic campaign. That volume also told how Lieutenant Prescott, aided by Soldiers Hal and Noll, succeeded at very nearly the cost of their lives in arresting a notorious and desperate criminal for the civil authorities, and how all this was done in the most soldier-like manner. It was such deeds as the scouting and the clever arrest that resulted in the appointment of the two chums as corporals. Then there was the affair, while the regulars

were on duty in summer encampment with the Colorado National Guard, in which Hal and Noll, acting under impulses of the highest chivalry, got themselves into trouble that came very near to driving them out of the service.

Since the last rousing scenes in and near Denver, something more than a year had passed. It was now the beginning of the fall of the year following when Corporal Hal Overton, with the signal flags under his arm, waited near the parade ground for that other fine young soldier, Corporal Noll Terry.

A year of busy life it had been, though in the main uneventful. Our two young corporals had spent most of their time since in perfecting themselves in the soldier's grim game. They were now looked upon as two of the very finest and staunchest young soldiers in the service.

"Oh, there comes Noll at last," muttered Corporal Overton some minutes later. "And it's high time, too, if he has any regard for the sacredness of a soldier's punctuality. But he's leaving the telegraph office. I wonder if the dear old fellow has been getting any bad news from the home town?"

Corporal Terry, as he came briskly along the smooth, hard walk of a well-kept military post, looked every inch as fine a soldier as his chum. By this time Noll was just as thoroughly in love

with all that pertained to the soldier's spirited life as was Overton.

"Think I was never coming?" hailed Noll gayly.

"I began to wonder if you weren't losing sight of the sacredness that is supposed to be attached to a soldier's appointment," said Hal dryly.

"I am afraid I have been so carried away with a new chance that I've treated you just a bit shabbily," Corporal Noll admitted.

"Think no more of it," begged Hal. "I got the flags."

"So my eyes tell me."

"And what have you been up to, Noll?"

"Oh, the greatest chance!" glowed Terry. "You know how hard I have been plugging away at telegraphy in spare time during the last few months?"

"Of course."

"Well, Lieutenant Ray is through with his tour of duty as officer in charge of our telegraph station, and Lieutenant Prescott has succeeded him for the next tour."

"Yes."

"I've been over to the telegraph office to interview Lieutenant Prescott, whom I saw going in there. Prescott is a grand young officer, isn't he?"

"Every man in the battalion knows that," Hal

agreed heartily, for, indeed, there were no two more popular young officers in the service than Lieutenants Prescott and Holmes, of B and C Companies, respectively.

Readers of our "High School Boys' Series" and of the "West Point Series" know all about Dick Prescott and Greg Holmes, once leaders among High School athletes and afterwards among the brightest and finest of West Point cadets. Prescott and Holmes were now fully launched in their careers as Army officers.

"Lieutenant Prescott has given me a really bully chance," Noll went on happily.

"Did you ask him for it?" suspected Corporal Hal shrewdly.

"Well, I—er—er—hinted some, I guess," responded Noll, with a quiet grin. "But if you want things in this world aren't you a heap more likely to get them by asking than by keeping quiet?"

"Surely. But go on and tell me what it is that you got."

"I haven't exactly got it yet," Noll continued. "But Lieutenant Prescott is going to recommend me for it, and ask Captain Cortland's permission."

"I guess you'll get it, then," nodded Hal Overton. "Mr. Prescott's superior officers think so highly of him that he usually doesn't have

to beg very hard to get what he wants. And—what is it?"

"Why, old fellow, I'm to be relieved from most other duties and placed in charge of the telegraph office. You know, there are two soldiers stationed there as day operators, and one as night operator. And I'm to be there in charge night and day."

"Good business," nodded Hal, "if you don't have to keep up night and day as well."

"Oh, no; I'm to be merely responsible to the lieutenant for the proper management of the office. I'm not to be tied down so very closely, after all, and I'm to have the proper amount of leave for recreation and all that sort of thing."

"When do you begin?"

"Day after to-morrow, at nine in the morning."

"You won't be on guard duty while this other detail lasts?"

"No."

"Too bad," muttered Hal. "Of course I may be wrong, but to me the thorough study of real guard duty is one of the most important things in a soldier's profession."

"Oh, I've mastered guard duty pretty well," broke in Corporal Noll.

"Then I congratulate you," was Hal Overton's dry rejoinder. "I feel that I'm only be-

ginning to see the real niceties of the work of the guard."

"We've an hour left before the next drill," resumed young Corporal Terry, after glancing at his watch. "Shall we go over and see if Sergeant Hupner is ready to start breaking us in at wig-wagging?"

"That's what I've been waiting to do," Hal Overton rejoined.

"You don't seem to be a bit glad over my success in getting into telegraphy," complained Noll.

"If it seemed that way, then it's because our tongues were too busy otherwise," Hal answered. "Noll, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart, for you're plumb wild to know all about telegraphing."

"Only because it's of use in the military world," explained Corporal Terry. "I wouldn't care a straw about being a telegraph operator in civil life."

"You wouldn't care about being anything else in civil life, would you?"

"No," Corporal Noll admitted promptly. "After a taste of real soldiering in the regular Army I don't see how on earth a fellow can be satisfied with any other kind of life. That is, if a fellow has life, spirit and red blood in him."

Sergeant Hupner proved not only to be dis-

engaged, but ready to begin the instruction of the aspiring young wig-waggers immediately.

It is really no part of an infantry soldier's duty to learn telegraphy, but he is trained at times in the use of the wig-wag signal flags. In the Army both telegraphy and signaling are work usually performed by members of the Signal Corps. In the case of telegraphy, however, at an infantry post where there is no detachment of Signal Corps men, then the work at the telegraph instruments must necessarily fall upon infantry soldiers, since some of the messages sent and received at a military post cannot be intrusted to men who have not taken the oath.

"You take one of the flags, Corporal Overton," began Sergeant Hupner, after stepping from barracks out into the open, "and I'll take the other at the outset. Corporal Terry can look on at first. Now, a signalman, at the beginning of his work, holds the flag straight up before him—so. Each letter in the alphabet has its own series of numbers to stand for it. These numbers are made by dropping the flag so many times to the right or left of your body. Thus——"

Sergeant Hupner described some rapid sweeps with the flag to right and left.

"A, B, C, D, E," he spelled along, as he signaled the letters.

"We know that part of it already, Sergeant," replied Corporal Hal. "We've been studying the alphabet and the punctuation points in the book." *

"Oh, I'll warrant that you've been studying the alphabet and everything connected with it," replied Sergeant Hupner, with a smile. "And I don't believe you'll need many points from me in order to become first-class signalmen. Take this flag, Terry. Now, Overton, stand off there and signal your full name to me. Spell out the letters slowly, so that I can criticize you when necessary."

Despite his knowledge of the alphabet Hal naturally made a few blunders at first.

"Your work lacks snap," remarked Sergeant Hupner. "Even when you spell slowly you should bring the flag down smartly to either side. Like this."

Sergeant Hupner illustrated briskly with his arms.

"Now send me the name of your regiment."

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*It would be an excellent idea to reproduce the wig-wag alphabet, with full directions for its use, in this volume of Mr. Hancock's, were it not for the fact that alphabet and directions have just been published in "The Battleship Boys' First Step Upward," which is the second volume in Frank Gee Patchin's Battleship Boys' Series. Readers, therefore, who would like to pick up this fascinating art of signaling messages from distant points will do well to consult Mr. Patchin's volume for simple and explicit directions.—EDITOR.

Hal did better this time.

"You'll soon have the hang of it," declared the sergeant encouragingly. "Now, send me the same thing over again, but with more speed."

"Fine!" added Hupner when Hal had obeyed. "Now, Terry, we'll try you for a few moments. What is your full name?"

Noll signaled it, making each letter carefully with the flag.

"Now tell me—with the flag—what you think of to-day's weather."

"Fine and cool," signaled back Noll.

Thus the instruction continued. Each young soldier improved a good deal during that hour.

"Now, we'll call it off until to-morrow," remarked the sergeant at last, and turned to reenter barracks.

"How do you like it, Noll?" asked Overton.

"Oh, it's all right," admitted boyish Corporal Terry. "But I'd rather have telegraphy. I don't see why you've been so wild over the wig-wag flags."

"For just one reason," responded Hal promptly. "Because it's all a part of the soldier's life and duty. I mean to know every phase and detail of the soldier's business that I can possibly pick up. And I hope you won't back out, Noll."

"Oh, no; I'll stick," agreed Corporal Terry, though it sounded as if he promised almost reluctantly.

Ta-ra-ta-ra-ta! The bugler was sounding the first call for drill. That sent the two boyish young corporals quickly into barracks with their signal flags, which they exchanged for their rifles.

Their old friend Hyman—no longer Private Hyman, but now, for three months, Corporal Hyman—regarded them with indulgent eyes.

"You kids been out learning how to wave the shirt?" he queried.

"Yes," nodded Hal. Then, with pretended severity, he demanded: "Do you think, Corporal Hyman, you have chosen a respectful enough manner in addressing other corporals who rank you by virtue of prior appointment to the grade?"

"Oh, nobody takes a corporal seriously except the corporal himself," drawled Hyman. "A corporal in the Army is only a small-fry boss. He's handy to lay the blame on for things, and he doesn't dare to 'sass' back. Neither does the corporal dare to 'take it out of' the private soldiers in his squad, for, if he did, the privates would report him and have him court-martialed. Kids, I'm growing rather tired of being a corporal. I think I'll go to the colonel and——"

But whatever Hyman was going to do he did not explain, for the notes of assembly rang out and all the men in the squad room hastened outside, yet did it with that dignity and seeming deliberation that the soldier soon acquires.

Drill was over in something like an hour. Hal and Noll returned to squad room, where they spent some little time going over their equipment. Then they sauntered outside, for there was still some time before the noon meal at company mess.

"Look at Hyman, in that tree over yonder," said Hal, nodding in the direction.

Corporal Hyman was sitting on one of the lower limbs of a tree some four hundred yards away. It was close to the wall that ran along the front of the reservation, and overlooked the road that came up from the town of Clowdry.

"Yes," grinned Noll. "It's a favorite trick with old Hyman to get up in a tree like that. Says he can think better that way than when he's touching common earth. Hello, he has jumped down to the wall. There he goes into the road outside."

"There was a cloud of dust along the road. I guess he's talking to some one in a carriage or an automobile," guessed Hal.

"Well, it's of no interest to us," mused Noll.

But in that Corporal Terry was wrong.

"There's Hyman up on the wall again," reported Hal.

"So I see, and he's making motions this way."

"He's signaling," muttered Hal, watching the motions of Corporal Hyman's right arm. He had started with that arm held up before his face. Now the arm was falling rythmically to left and right. "Why, Hyman is asking, 'Can you read this?' "

Then, raising his own arm, Hal signaled back: "Yes."

Again Hyman's right arm was moving. Hal watched closely, spelling out the wig-wagged signal:

"Pipe—off—what's—coming. Greatest—ever happened—in the—Army. Don't—miss—it."

"Now, what on earth can that be?" queried Noll.

"It must be something unusual to rouse enthusiasm in a man like Hyman," laughed Hal.

And indeed it was something great that was coming. Corporal Hyman's wig-wagging arm was moving again.

"Hustle—over—to—main—road."

Hal and Noll were instantly in motion. It must be confessed that they were eager.

Little did they guess that the coming event was of a nature destined soon to have the whole post at Fort Clowdry by the ears!

CHAPTER II

LIEUTENANT "ALGY" JOINS THE ARMY

IN at the gate down by post number one—in other words, at the guard house—turned an extremely large and costly-looking seven-passenger touring car.

At the driver's post sat an undersized, shrewd-looking little Frenchman.

Behind him, in one of the five seats of the tonneau sat a dapper-looking young man of medium height, with a soft, curly little moustache and dressed in the height of masculine fashion.

At post number one the car was halted, apparently much to the surprise of the solitary passenger, who leaned indolently forward and exchanged some words with the sentry.

"Gracious!" gasped Noll. "He must be a person of some importance, after all. There's the sentry presenting arms."

"And there comes the corporal of the guard, making a rifle salute," added Hal. "It must be a new officer joining the regiment."

"That—an officer?" gasped Noll, in unfeigned disgust. "Don't libel the good old Army, Hal."

Of a sudden the big car shot forward again, and came up the main road to officers' row at a smashing clip.

Then, just as suddenly, it halted beside the two young corporals.

"Hello, boys!" greeted the dapper, smiling little fellow in the tonneau. "Say, I'm afraid I'm all at sea. I've come to live with you fellows, but I'm blessed if I haven't already forgotten what that fellow with the gun told me down at the porter's lodge."

"Porter's lodge? Do you mean the guard house, sir?" Hal asked respectfully.

"Why, yes—if that's what you call it—of course. Names don't matter much to me. Never did. Some one over in Washington—the secretary of something or other—sent me over here. I'm a new lieutenant, and I believe I'm to stay at this beastly place."

At the mention of the word "lieutenant" both Hal and Noll came to a very formal salute.

"Now, what do you mean by that?" smiled the new-comer affably. "Sign of some lodge on the post? I haven't had time to get into any of your secret societies yet, of course."

"We offered you the officer's salute, sir," explained Corporal Hal.

"Oh, then you're officers? I guessed as much," beamed the pleasant young stranger.

"No; we're corporals, sir," Hal informed him.

"Oh, yes; seems to me I've heard about corporals. I'll know more about them later, I dare say. How are you, anyway, boys?"

The stranger leaned out over the side of the car, extending his hand to Corporal Overton, who could not very well refuse it. Then Noll came in for a handshake.

"Of course you understand sir, that we're below the grade of officers," Hal continued.

"Oh, pshaw!" replied the still smiling stranger. "Such things as that don't count. And I've been warned that the Army is one of the most democratic places in the world. I haven't brought any of my 'lugs' here with me—'pon my word I haven't. I'm Lieutenant Algernon Ferrers. I hope all of you fellows will soon like me well enough to call me Algy."

Though Mr. Ferrers was certainly the biggest joke in the way of an officer that either of the young soldiers had ever seen, it was impossible not to like this pleasant young man.

"Jump in—won't you, boys?" invited Lieutenant Ferrers, throwing the nearer door of the tonneau open. "I'll be tremendously obliged if you'll pilot me to the right place. Where do I ring the bell? Of course I've got to give some one here the glad hand before I can be shown to my rooms."

Though they did so with some misgivings Hal and Noll both stepped into the tonneau.

"Sit right down, boys," urged Lieutenant Ferrers amiably.

"Pardon me, sir," explained Hal Overton. "It would be a bad breach of discipline in this regiment for any enlisted man to sit in the company of his officers."

"Oh, you're enlisted men, eh?" queried the new lieutenant, showing no signs whatever of feeling taken aback. "I'm glad to say I didn't have to enlist. My guv'nor has some good friends at Washington, and I was appointed from civil life."

Hal and Noll had already guessed that much without difficulty. No officer quite like Lieutenant Ferrers had ever been turned out at West Point, and surely such a man had never risen from the ranks. Now, when all the West Point graduates have been commissioned into the Army, and all meritorious enlisted men have been promoted to second lieutenancies, then, if there be any vacancies left, the President fills these vacancies in the rank of second lieutenant, by appointing young men from civil life.

Generally these appointments from civil life go to the honor graduates of colleges where military drill is conducted by an officer of the Army detailed as instructor. But, occasionally,

there are more vacancies than these honor graduates can or will fill—and then political influence very often plays a part in the appointment of some young men as lieutenants in the Army.

"Tell François where to drive, will you?" begged Lieutenant Ferrers.

"I don't believe, sir, that Colonel North is at his office so late in the forenoon," Corporal Hal replied. "But I think, sir, that Captain Hale, the regimental adjutant, will be found there."

"Does Hale assign a fellow's rooms to him?" queried Lieutenant Ferrers innocently.

"If you are under orders to join, sir, you will be expected to report to Colonel North, or else to the regimental adjutant, who represents the colonel."

"I—see," nodded the new lieutenant slowly. "Will you do me the extreme favor to tell François where to leave us?"

Hal leaned forward, indicating the headquarters building.

In another moment the big car stopped before headquarters.

"Come right on in, fellows, and introduce me, won't you?" urged Lieutenant Ferrers.

"I—I am afraid we'd better not," replied Hal, flushing.

"Oh, I see—you've a luncheon appointment, or something of the sort, eh? Well, never

mind; glad to have met you. Expect to have many a good time with you later on. Good fellows, both of you, I'll wager."

"Come away from here, Noll," begged Hal, as soon as Mr. Ferrers had run up the steps and into the building. "I'm suffocating."

"I'm green," grinned Noll chokingly, "but I'd hate to have as much ahead of me to learn as that new officer has."

"Oh, perhaps he was joshing us," suggested Hal.

"Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think," responded Noll, struggling hard to keep his gravity, "that Mr. Ferrers is kidding himself worse than any one else."

In the meantime Ferrers had bounded past an orderly and had broken into the office of the regimental adjutant.

"Hello, old chap!" was his joyous greeting of dignified Captain Hale.

"Sir?" demanded the regimental adjutant. "Who the blazes are you, sir?"

"Name's Ferrers, old chap," responded the newcomer, lightly, dropping a card down on the adjutant's desk.

Captain Hale glanced at the card. Then a light seemed to dawn on him.

"Oh! I think it likely you are the Lieuten-

ant Ferrers who has been ordered to the Thirty-fourth," went on Captain Hale.

"You're a wonderful guesser, old chap. Now, where do I go to see about my rooms, housing my servants, storing my cars, etc.?"

Captain Hale tried to hide his grim smile as he held out his hand.

"Welcome to the Thirty-fourth, Mr. Ferrers. And now I think I had better take you to Colonel North. He has been expecting you."

Lieutenant Algernon Ferrers followed the broad-backed adjutant into an inner office, where the very young man was presented to the grizzled-gray Colonel North. Then, as quickly as he could, Captain Hale escaped back to his desk in the outer office.

Colonel North looked at Mr. Ferrers with a glance that did not convey absolute approval.

"Have you been in a train wreck, Mr. Ferrers?" inquired the colonel.

"Oh, dear me, no. Do I look as bad as that?" inquired the new lieutenant, with a downward glance at his faultless attire.

"But you were due to arrive here at four o'clock yesterday afternoon, Mr. Ferrers," continued the colonel. "I was here at my desk, waiting to receive you."

"I hope I didn't inconvenience you any," murmured Ferrers. "You see, Colonel, when

I got in at Pueblo I ran across some old friends at the station. They insisted on my staying over with them for half a day. I couldn't very well get out of it, you see."

"Couldn't very well get out of it?" repeated Colonel North distinctly and coldly. "Wouldn't it have been enough, Mr. Ferrers, to have told your friends that you were under orders to be here at four o'clock yesterday?"

"Oh, I say, now," murmured Mr. Ferrers, "I hope you're not going to raise any beastly row about it."

"That is not language to use to your superior officer, Mr. Ferrers!"

"Then you have my instant apology, Colonel," protested the young man. "But, you see, these were very important people that I met—the Porter-Stanleys, of New York. Very likely you have met them."

Colonel North now found it hard to repress a tendency to laugh. But he choked it back.

"I am afraid, Mr. Ferrers, you do not realize the seriousness of failing to obey a military order punctually. More than that, I fear it would take more time than I have between now and luncheon to make it plain to you. But I assure you that you have a great deal, a very great deal, to learn about the strict requirements of Army life and conduct."

"And you'll find me very keen to learn, sir, very keen, I assure you. But, since you're good enough to postpone telling me more about such little matters, may I ask you, Colonel, who will show me to my rooms? I shall need quite a few, for, outside of two chauffeurs—I have five auto cars you know—I have also four household servants and a valet."

"You have—what!" gasped Colonel North.

Mr. Ferrers patiently repeated the details concerning the number of his automobiles and servants.

"And where are they?" demanded the regimental commander.

"I left them over in Clowdry until I send for them, sir."

"Mr. Ferrers, have you any idea how many rooms an unmarried second lieutenant has?"

"A dozen or fifteen, I hope," suggested Mr. Ferrers hopefully. "A gentleman, of course, can't live in fewer rooms."

"Mr. Ferrers, an unmarried second lieutenant lives in bachelor officers' quarters. He has a parlor, bed-room and bath."

"Oh, I say now," protested poor Mr. Ferrers earnestly, "you can't expect me to get along in any such dog-kennel of a place."

"You'll have to, Mr. Ferrers."

"But my servants—my chauffeurs?"

"No room for them on this post."

"But I can't keep five cars running without at least two chauffeurs. And by the way, Colonel, what kind of a garage do you have here?"

"None whatever, Mr. Ferrers. You can keep one small car down at the quartermaster's stables, but that is the best you can do."

Lieutenant Algernon Ferrers, who instantly realized that this fine-looking old colonel was not making game of him, sat back staring, a picture of hopeless dejection.

"I had no idea the Army was anything like as beastly as this," he murmured disconsolately.

"If you're going to remain in the service, Mr. Ferrers," returned the colonel, "I'm afraid you will have to recast many of your ideas. In the first place, you won't need servants. You'll get your meals at the officers' mess, and all the servants needed there are provided."

"But I must have some one to take care of even my two poor little rooms," fidgeted Mr. Ferrers. "I can't undertake to do that myself. Besides, Colonel, I don't know how to do housework."

"Some of the work in your rooms you should and must do yourself," explained Colonel North. "Such, for example, as tidying up your quarters. The rougher work you can have done by a striker."

"Striker?" echoed Mr. Ferrers, a gleam of intelligence coming into his eyes. "No, thank you, Colonel. Strikers never work. I've heard my guv'nor talk about strikes in his business."

"'Striker,'" explained Colonel North, "is Army slang. Your 'striker' is a private soldier, whom you hire at so many a dollars a month to do the rougher work in your quarters. You make whatever bargain you choose with the soldier. At this post the bachelor officers usually pay a striker eight dollars a month."

"At that price I can afford a lot of 'em," responded Mr. Ferrers, brightening considerably.

"An unmarried officer is not allowed to have more than one striker in this regiment," said the colonel, whereat Ferrer's face showed his dismay. "Nor is any soldier obliged to become your striker. You cannot engage him unless the soldier is wholly willing. However, a good many men like the extra pay. You will be assigned to A company. Direct the first sergeant of that company to send you a man who is willing to serve as a striker. And now, Mr. Ferrers, as you appear to be wholly ignorant of Army life I think I will give you a mentor."

Turning to the telephone Colonel North called:

"Connect me with Lieutenant Prescott. "Hello, is that you, Mr. Prescott? The regi-

mental commander is speaking. My compliments, Mr. Prescott, and can you come over to headquarters? Thank you."

Ringing off the colonel turned to his very new young lieutenant, saying:

"Mr. Prescott is a last year's graduate of the Military Academy at West Point, and one of the most capable younger officers I have ever met. I can think of no man so well qualified to coach you in the start of your new life, Mr. Ferrers. You have some baggage with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Two trunks on the car."

"Then you have uniforms with you?"

"Yes."

"Say 'sir' when answering a superior officer."

"Yes, sir."

"You have your two regulation swords?"

"Yes, sir. And say!" Ferrers beamed forth, with enthusiasm, while his eyes lit up. "The regulation swords are not such a much, so, while I got them, I also had four other swords made that are a whole lot handsomer. Wait until you see me, sir, with the beauty that Tiffany made to my order—my own design, sir."

"Doubtless your extra swords will do very well as ornaments in your quarters, Mr. Ferrers," replied the colonel, trying very hard to keep a straight face. "But you will not appear with any other than the regulation swords."

"Oh, I say, now——" broke forth Ferrers anxiously, but the door opened, and Lieutenant Dick Prescott strode in, looking the perfection of handsome soldiery.

"You sent for me, sir?" Prescott asked, coming to a very formal salute.

"Yes, Mr. Prescott. This young gentleman is Lieutenant Algernon Ferrers, lately appointed from civil life. As Mr. Ferrers will presently be glad to admit that he knows less than nothing about Army life, I can think of no one better qualified than you, Mr. Prescott, to explain to him the nature of military life."

"Thank you, Colonel," replied Prescott gravely.

"Kindly take Mr. Ferrers over to the officers' mess and see that he is made to feel at home among you youngsters. And advise him, in all necessary respects, as to what is expected of him in this regiment."

"But my rooms, sir? My little dog-kennel?" urged Ferrers.

"Mr. Prescott will take you to Lieutenant Pope, the battalion quartermaster, who will assign you to quarters. And, Mr. Prescott, make it a point to introduce Mr. Ferrers to Major Silsbee and also Captain Ruggles of A company, for Mr. Ferrers is assigned to that company."

Prescott saluted smartly in leaving his

colonel. Ferrers also endeavored to salute, and imitated badly—with the wrong hand.

As soon as the door had closed Colonel North rose, sighed and muttered:

"With a seeming idiot like that on officers' row I can see our old and happy life here passing."

Lieutenant Ferrers, after an infinite amount of coaching by Mr. Prescott, turned out at afternoon parade. Ferrers did not take his post with his company, but stood at one side, out of the way, watching the work with a rather bored look.

By the time that the men were dismissed from parade every enlisted man in barracks appeared to have heard a lot about Lieutenant Ferrers. Every man was either telling or listening to some anecdote about the new young officer, and roars of laughter rang on all sides, for Algy Ferrers, during the brief afternoon, had managed, in spite of Prescott, to make a whole lot of ridiculous breaks.

"That young shave-tail won't last two weeks in the service," predicted Corporal Hyman, who, though he now belonged in another squad room, was just now visiting with Sergeant Hupner's men.

"Oh, I don't know," Noll answered thoughtfully. "I've seen a lot of worse enlisted men

licked into shape and become good soldiers. I don't know why the rule shouldn't work as well with a new officer."

Corporal Hal, at this moment, was down at the further end of the squad room, close to an open window. Here, where he had plenty of space for manœuvring, he was practising some moves with the signal flag, while Sergeant Hupner stood by criticising.

"Of all the dizzy young rookies with the waving shirt I consider you the worst," jeered Corporal Hyman, stepping over. "Here, I'm going to take that thing away from you. What you need, Overton, is rest."

Hyman made a dive for the signal flag. Corporal Hal resisted the effort to take it away from him, and a good-natured scuffle followed. While it was going on Hal was forced into the open window.

Hyman seized the staff, giving it a twist. Then Hal started to recover it.

Thus the staff dropped and fell below, just as young Corporal Overton sprang inward.

Instantly, however, the boy remembered that it might drop on some one's head. He wheeled like a flash, bending out of the window, just as a howl floated upward.

"Hey, you idiot!" followed the howl, and the young corporal saw Hinkey, a new recruit in

the regiment and company, take off his hat and rub a rising lump on the top of his head.

"Look out below, there!" called Corporal Hal.

"What else are you going to throw out at me?" glared Private Hinkey.

For answer, Corporal Hal sprang over the window sill, landing lightly on the ground below.

"Hinkey, I'm mighty sorry," began Overton. "It was an accident, and——"

"An accident?" flared Hinkey sulkily. "I suppose you expect me to believe that you slammed that flagstaff down and hit me on the top of the head, and that it was all an accident?"

"I certainly do expect you to believe it," replied Corporal Hal, his face flushing.

"Well, I don't," came the ugly response, accompanied by another scowl. "It's a lie, and——"

"Be careful, Hinkey!" warned Corporal Overton, his fine young face paling slightly. "Passing the lie, you know, don't go in the Army!"

"I don't care a hang what goes in the Army," snarled the private, who was a man some twenty-eight years of age, dark of complexion and forbidding of feature. "You've had it in

for me all along, Corporal Overton. Only yesterday morning you scorched me at drill."

"You needed it," was the quiet reply. "And I used no abusive language."

"Good thing you didn't," flashed Hinkey. "And the day before——"

"Stop your whining and let me look at your head," advised Corporal Overton. "Whew, what a bump! Hinkey, I'm truly sor——"

"Get away from me, and never mind my head," snapped the other.

"But man, the flesh is cut, and the bump is already the size of a hen's egg, and growing. You must have that attended to at hospital."

"I'll do what I please about that," retorted Hinkey.

"No; you'll do as you're told. You will report to First Sergeant Gray at once, and ask his permission to report at hospital without delay."

"Perhaps you think I will," came the disagreeable retort.

"I know you will," said Corporal Overton more sternly, "for it's a military order and you have no choice but to obey. And, if you think I did that purposely——"

"I don't think, Overton. I know you did."

"Then I'll post you as to your rights in the matter, Private Hinkey. When you report to Sergeant Gray for hospital permission, which

you will do at once, you can also state that you believe I assaulted you purposely. Then Sergeant Gray will arrange for you to go to Captain Cortland and make regular complaint against me."

"You think I'm a fool, don't you?" jeered Hinkey.

"On that point I decline to commit myself."

"Fine to go and complain against an officers' pet and boot-lick," laughed Hinkey sullenly. "No, sir! I'll go to no officer with a charge against a favored boot-lick!"

"That's the only way in which you can get redress."

"Is it?" demanded Private Hinkey, with a sudden, intense scowl that made his ill-featured face look satanic. "Well, you wait and see, my fine young buck doughboy!"

"Don't fail to report to Sergeant Gray for hospital permission," Corporal Hal Overton called after the fellow. "If you do, you'll be up against disobedience of orders."

Private Hinkey, moving away, made a derisive gesture behind his back, but the boyish young corporal turned on his heel, stepping off in another direction.

"If that kid thinks he can lord it over me," snarled Private Hinkey under his breath, "he's due to wake up before long."

Nevertheless Private Hinkey had already learned enough of Army life to feel certain that he was obliged to go to Sergeant Gray.

"Sure thing! Go over to hospital and have that head dressed at once," ordered the first sergeant. "How did it happen?"

"The fellow who did it said it was an accident," replied Hinkey, with an ugly leer.

"Then report him," urged the first sergeant of B Company. "I can take care of the offender if it was done on purpose."

"That's all right," snapped Private Hinkey. "So can I."

"If Hinkey is telling the truth, then there's the start of a nice little row in that sore head," thought Gray, glancing after the man headed for hospital.

And, indeed, Sergeant Gray was wholly right.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST BREATH AGAINST A SOLDIER'S HONOR

THE night was so quiet, the air so still, that the single, distant stroke of the town clock bell over in the town of Clowdry was distinctly audible.

Dong! boomed the bell, the vibration reaching the ears of two or three of the lighter sleepers, and causing them to stir lightly in their sleep in Sergeant Hupner's squad room.

Out on the post, not far away, a dog chose to bark at that town-clock bell.

Some one gliding swiftly through the squad room upset a stool with a loud crash. Yet few of the soundly sleeping soldiers bothered their heads about such a series of trivial noises.

Now, a series of hails began, starting down at the guard house and running rapidly around the sentry posts until the sentry pacing near barracks caught it up and called lustily:

"Post number six. One o'clock, and all's well!"

One man in especial had been stirring on his cot as though trying to throw off some phantom of dread. Now instantly after the sentry's hail this stirring sleeper emitted an excited yell.

"Wow! Turn out the guard—post number six!"

Instantly Sergeant Hupner awoke, sitting up on his cot.

"What's the matter with you, you idiot?" growled the disturbed sergeant.

"I've been touched!" wailed the excited voice.

It was the voice of Private William Green, the joke of the squad room, the man who hoarded his money and carried much of it about with him.

"Go to sleep, William," ordered the sergeant in a more soothing voice. "I've often told you that one so young shouldn't drink coffee at supper."

"I've been touched, I tell you!" insisted William Green, now out of his bed and feeling with frantic hands under the head of the mattress. "Don't I know? I tell you, my buckskin pouch is gone. Some one was in this room and got it!"

In a jiffy Sergeant Hupner was out of bed. His groping right hand found the switch and turned on the electric lights. Then Hupner jumped for his uniform trousers and drew them on.

"What's wrong, squad room?" called the voice of the alert sentry outside.

But Hupner first went to the door of the squad room, locked it and dropped the key in his trousers' pocket. Then the sergeant ran to an open window.

"I don't believe it's anything worse than a nightmare of one of the men, sentry. Don't call the guard until I look about a bit."

"Very good, Sergeant."

Then Hupner turned to the cot of Corporal Hal Overton, which was close to the window.

"Why, Corporal, what ails you?" demanded the sergeant. "You're shaking and your face has a frightened look."

"I—I have just awakened from a pretty bad dream," Corporal Hal replied sheepishly. "I'll be over it at once."

"Turn out, Corporal, and you also, Corporal Terry. We've got to investigate in this room."

Hal instantly thrust a leg out. Something dropped to the floor.

Bang!

"Ow!" wailed Private Green. "It wasn't a dream, after all. I knew it would go off."

Sergeant Hupner, bending low like a flash, now picked up a revolver from the floor beside Hal's cot, while Hal himself sat up, staring rather dazedly at the weapon.

"How did this come to be in your bed, Corporal Overton?" demanded the sergeant.

"I don't know, Sergeant."

"But it was in your bed. You shook it out when you went to get up just now."

"That's the gun," insisted Private William Green. "I saw it poked into my face by some one prowling before my cot."

"Were you so scared that you didn't dare jump up or say anything?" demanded Hupner, turning upon Private Green, who had now reached the vicinity of Hal's cot.

"Scared, nothing!" grunted Private William. "I thought I must be dreaming, for there was no danger in this room. Then I heard something go smash down the room, like a stool being tipped over, and then I came altogether out of my doze, and time I did, too! For I put my hand under the mattress and my pouch and money were gone. Whoever poked that gun toward my head got my money!"

By this time more than half the men in the room were sitting up on the edges of their cots. A few more lay still, though wide awake, while a few of the hardest sleepers were still in the Land of Nod.

"Green, are you sure your money's gone?" insisted Hupner sternly. It was no light thing to the reliable old sergeant to find that he had a thief in his squad room.

"Come and look for yourself, Sergeant."

"Corporals Overton and Terry, dress yourselves," ordered the sergeant, as he started after Private William Green. "The rest of you men needn't dress unless I direct it."

"Now, look here, Sergeant," insisted Green, after pulling the mattress bodily from his cot. "Do you see anything that looks like my buckskin pouch?"

There was no pouch to be found on or near Soldier William's cot.

"How much money did you have in the pouch?" demanded Hupner almost angrily.

"Seven hundred and ten dollars," declared Green promptly.

"Whew!"

To most of the soldiers present that much money represented a fortune.

Yet no one in the room thought of doubting William's assertion. As readers of the preceding volume know, Green had had considerable money when he joined the regiment something more than a year earlier. And William was known to be one who was constantly adding to his money by saving his pay.

Moreover, Private Green had made not a little by lending money to comrades in the battalion. He loaned on the time-honored system of lending among enlisted men in the Army—the system of "five now but six on pay day."

There are soldiers in every company—in every squad room—who always spend their pay within a few days after receiving it from the paymaster. As soon as his money is gone, and he needs or wants more, the improvident soldier turns to some comrade who saves and lends his money. The loan is five dollars, but by all the traditions the borrower must return six on pay day.

William Green had been making money on this plan. Some of his wealth Green now had on deposit at a Denver bank, but much of his "pile" he always insisted on carrying with him.

And usually this is a safe enough plan. In no body of men in the world does honesty average higher than among the soldiers of the American regular Army.

Once in a while, of course, an exceptional "black sheep" may get in even among soldiers, and William had often been warned not to keep so much convertible wealth about his person. But William trusted his comrades and carried large sums of cash.

"Corporal Overton, you take one side of the room, and Corporal Terry the other. Scan the floor for any sign of a buckskin pouch."

"Let me help," begged William.

"All right," nodded Sergeant Hupner. "And look, also, for any stool that may be overturned."

The search was unavailing. No sight was gained of the buckskin pouch, while every stool in the room was upright and in place.

"Does any man here know anything about Green's buckskin?" demanded Hupner.

There was no answer.

Crossing to the window, Sergeant Hupner called:

"Sentry, call the corporal of the guard."

Almost immediately the corporal of the guard was at hand. Sergeant Hupner informed him that there had probably been a robbery in the squad room and stated the known circumstances briefly.

Corporal Jason immediately sent a member of the guard to arouse the officer of the day and ask him to come to the squad room.

Soon after Lieutenant Greg Holmes strode into the room, his sword clanking at his side.

Lieutenant Holmes heard Sergeant Hupner's report, which was but a short one.

Then the young officer of the day turned to Corporal Hal, eyeing him keenly.

"Corporal Overton, isn't there something you can tell me about this? You were found awake, shaking somewhat and with an alarmed look on your face."

"That is true, sir," Hal Overton admitted.

"When Sergeant Hupner directed you to rise

you did so, and at the same time kicked out of your bed this revolver, which was discharged."

"Yes, sir."

"Corporal," continued Lieutenant Holmes, "it would look as though you must have some knowledge of the affair. Bear in mind that I am not making any charge against you."

"I—I should hope not, sir," stammered Hal Overton, his face growing very pallid.

"What do you know about this matter, Corporal Overton?" pressed the young officer.

"Absolutely nothing, sir, more than Sergeant Hupner has already stated to you, sir. My condition of apparent fright was due to a bad dream from which I was at the moment waking."

"And you know nothing whatever regarding the robbery from Private Green?"

"Absolutely nothing more than the rest, sir," insisted Hal, though his color continued to rise.

The young soldier felt that he was half suspected, and he felt all the awkwardness of innocence—an awkwardness that real guilt seldom displays.

"Men," it was Sergeant Hupner's voice breaking the stillness now, "if you each want to clear your own individual selves you will step forward and volunteer to have your persons and your belongings searched."

Instantly the men moved forward, and Lieutenant Holmes glanced away from Hal Overton. The lieutenant's survey of the lad's face had not been in the least accusing, but merely a keen look of inquiry.

"All the men in the room have come forward and are willing to be searched, sir," reported the sergeant.

"Good enough, Sergeant, since they volunteer, but I would not have them forced without an order from the post commander. Sergeant, will you undertake the search?"

"Yes, sir; shall I have the corporals assist me?"

"Yes, Sergeant, and I will lend a general oversight at the same time."

That search occupied some forty minutes. Not only were the persons of the men searched, but their chests and all their belongings. Hupner and his two boyish young corporals asked Lieutenant Holmes to search them himself, which the officer of the day did.

"There doesn't appear to be a chance that Private Green's money is in this room, or in the possession of any man in the room," remarked Lieutenant Holmes at last. "Green, you should have taken sensible advice and deposited your money, either with the paymaster or at a bank."

"I shall, sir, if I ever get it back," replied William Green mournfully.

"Well, there appears to be nothing more that I can do," continued Lieutenant Holmes. "However, I will return to the guard house and call up the commanding officer over the telephone, reporting the matter. Let your men go to bed, Sergeant, but you will remain up until either I return or send you some word through the corporal of the guard."

After the officer of the day had gone out, the men of the squad room looked from one to another in bewilderment.

"If any fellow took my money for a joke," announced Private William Green, "I'll call it all off if he'll be kind enough to return it."

No one accepted the offer.

"It's gone, all right, Green, evidently, and serves you right," said Sergeant Hupner gruffly.

In the course of a few minutes the corporal of the guard came back to inform Sergeant Hupner that a guard would be set, both in the corridor and outside, to prevent any man from leaving this squad room during the night. In the morning, immediately following first call to reveille, Colonel North, his adjutant and the officer of the day would visit the squad room together.

"And that's all there is to it, for to-night, men," announced Sergeant Hupner. "Every

man in bed now, for I'm going to switch off the light."

Ten minutes later some of the soldiers were asleep, but not all, for presently Hupner's strong military voice boomed through the room:

"Stop that whispering! Silence until first call goes in the morning."

After first call to reveille did sound in the morning barely sixty seconds passed when the door was opened to Colonel North and the two officers accompanying him.

Then, indeed, there was a thorough examination. Each man in the room was questioned keenly by the colonel himself.

"Corporal Overton, how do you account for that revolver being in your bed?"

Colonel North held up the weapon. It was an ordinary service revolver, such as is worn by an orderly when on duty without rifle, and there were many such revolvers in barracks. No soldier was supposed to have one of these revolvers, except by orders, yet it would be easy enough for any soldier to get one by stealth.

"I can't account for it, sir," Hal answered. "I didn't have it myself, or put it in the bed, and I can only guess that some one else did."

"Why should any one else do that, Corporal?"

"Possibly, sir, with a view to making me appear guilty."

"Do you suspect any one in particular?"

"No, sir; I can't imagine why any man in the room, or in the battalion, should want to do it."

"You understand, Corporal Overton, that you are not under any charge, or even suspicion, of guilt in the matter," continued the commanding officer, for Hal in truth was esteemed much too fine a young soldier to be suspected by his officers in the present case.

"Thank you, sir," Hal replied.

The inquiry was soon over and proved as resultless as that made alone by Lieutenant Greg Holmes in the middle of the night. The officers left and the men prepared to hasten out for breakfast formation.

"I never thought Overton would do a trick like that," remarked a low voice behind the young corporal, but Hal heard it.

"Oh, you can't tell. Sometimes these quiet fellows are the worst. Still waters run deep, you know."

"I suppose other fellows in the squad room are thinking the same," thought Hal, his heart throbbing with pain.

He more than half guessed the truth—that the seed of suspicion against him was already sown—that henceforth he would be watched by nearly all eyes.

CHAPTER IV

LIEUTENANT ALGY'S INSPIRATION

LIEUTENANT ALGY FERRERS, the picture of dejection, sat staring across his rather tiny parlor in bachelor quarters at smiling Lieutenant Prescott.

"I thought the Army was a place for gentlemen," murmured Algy aghast.

"At last accounts it was, and I believe still is," replied the West Pointer, with a smile.

"But consider that beastly schedule of the day's work that you've been explaining to me!"

"What's wrong with it?" asked Lieutenant Prescott patiently.

"What's first—what did you call it?"

"First call to reveille, at 5.50 in the morning?"

"Yes; what an utterly impossible time for any gentleman to be out of bed. Unless," added Algy with a sudden bright thought, "he stays up until then, and goes to bed after the beastly row is over."

"That would hardly do, I'm afraid," Lieutenant Prescott laughed softly. "You see, the day is full of duties. Now, sharp at six the march——"

"March? At six in the morning?" gasped Algy Ferrers, his despair increasing by leaps and bounds. "Man alive, I wouldn't feel like crawling—at that time!"

"The term has confused you," replied Prescott. "It's the musician of the guard—the bugler—who plays the march. It's a strain that is played, the first note beginning just as the reveille gun is fired, at the minute of six in the morning. Then, just five minutes later reveille itself is blown."

"All that racket will wake me up mornings," complained Algy sadly.

"It ought to, for it's an officer's business to be up by that time."

"Good heavens!" groaned Algy. "Say, 'pon my word, I'll hate to have any soldiers see me when I'm looking as seedy as I'll look at that time of the day."

"You won't see them immediately," Prescott replied.

"Don't I have to go to my men as soon as I'm up?"

"No; officers don't go down to barracks to see their men rise. Now, listen. Reveille sounds at 6.05, with assembly and roll-call right afterward. There's a very brief athletic drill, followed by recall from the drill at 6.15 o'clock. At 6.20 mess call for breakfast is sounded.

Right after breakfast comes police of quarters and premises. 'Police' is the Army term for cleaning up and making everything tidy. Then, just at 7 o'clock the bugler of the guard sounds sick call. The first sergeant of each company makes up the sick report, and a corporal marches the men out who need the doctor—the 'rain-maker,' we call him in the Army. Now, with all that happens up to this time the non-commissioned officers—sergeants and corporals—have to do."

"Then I can sleep a little later, can't I?" proposed Lieutenant Ferrers hopefully.

"If you do you'll be sure to get yourself in a scrape. You'll be coming out of your quarters unshaven, or with your uniform put on too hastily. Colonel North is a true Tartar with any officer who doesn't start the day looking like bandbox goods. And, my dear fellow, it's no greater hardship for you to be up early than it is for the enlisted man. Now, at 7.10 in the morning comes first call to drill. Drill assembly goes at 7.20."

"Do I have to be there?"

"You do, unless excused for some very grave reason. Recall from drill sounds at 8.20."

"That means that drill is over, then?" sighed Algy questioningly.

"Yes. Then, at 8.30, is fatigue call."

"I shall be properly fatigued by that time, no doubt," confessed Algy wretchedly.

"You'll soon understand what 'fatigue' is in the Army," smiled Lieutenant Prescott. "It's more work, but work that is done without arms."

"Without arms? With the feet, then?"

Lieutenant Prescott bit his lip, but answered:

"By arms this time I mean weapons. First call to guard mounting comes at 8.50, and guard mounting assembly at 9. At 10 another drill begins; at 11 the recall sounds, with recall from fatigue at 11.30. Mess call for enlisted men is at noon, and 1 p. m. fatigue call. Drill call goes again at 1.50, with drill assembly at 2 o'clock. The time spent at these drills varies according to the nature of the work and the orders. Recall from fatigue sounds at 5 o'clock. Parade assembly is at 5.30 at this time of the year, with retreat and evening gun-fire at 6.10. Then comes mess call to supper. With that ends, usually, the working day of the enlisted man. Tattoo sounds at 9 in the evening, with call to quarters at 10.45, and taps, or lights out, at 11 p. m. Except when on guard or special duty you're not likely to have to be with your men much after retreat."

"Oh, I should hope not," exclaimed Algy Ferrers fervently. "By supper time I can see myself a nervous wreck."

"Oh, you'll get used to it," laughed Prescott. "The rest of us all had to."

"And at all of those beastly things and jobs you enumerated, Prescott, I've got to be present and actually do a lot of work?"

"A big lot of work, you'll find."

"And yet they call being an officer in the Army a gentleman's life."

"Yes," replied Prescott, his eyes opening rather wide. "Don't you consider that one may be a gentleman and yet be industrious?"

"Oh, I reckon so," sighed Algy Ferrers. "But it all seems a beastly grind."

"Then how did your ever come to think of going into the Army?"

"I didn't," almost flared up Algy. "It was the guv'nor. He forced me into it. Said he'd cut my allowance off altogether, and leave me out of his will if I didn't get to work. And he chose the Army for me, and put the whole thing through. Wasn't it beastly of the guv'nor?"

"I'm not so sure that it was," smiled Lieutenant Prescott. "Of course it was different with me. My father worked, and had to, or starve. It was the same with me, which may be why I can look upon the idea of a lot of work without feeling insulted by fate. But I reckon, Ferrers, that no man is worth his salt in the world unless he does work."

This was the day after Algy's arrival. Colonel North and Major Silsbee had not yet put the new young officer actually at work. They had allowed him this time of grace to get settled in his new quarters, and to talk over his new duties with young Prescott.

"I can never remember all that long list of things you told me, dear fellow," complained Algy. "Won't you do me a great, big favor?"

"What?"

"Write down for me that—er—time table you laid down for me."

"No." Lieutenant Prescott's tone was almost abrupt. "I'll repeat it to you, Ferrers, and you can write it down for yourself. Get a pencil and paper."

"Give me just time for a cigarette before I take up such exhausting literary work," begged Algy, reaching for his gold cigarette case. "Have one, dear fellow?"

"Thank you, Ferrers. I don't smoke."

"Then what do you do with your time?"

"Work!"

"What beastly old rot the Army is!" murmured Algy, lying back in his easy chair and blowing a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

Rap-tap! sounded at the door.

"Come in," called Algy. It was Lieutenant Holmes who entered.

"Howdy-do, Ferrers?" he hailed the new officer. "I heard Prescott was here and came to find him. You'll pardon me, won't you?"

"Nothing to pardon," murmured Algy.

"Old ramrod," began Lieutenant Holmes, turning to his chum and addressing him by the old West Point nickname, "I came to see you about your pet. He seems to be in increasing trouble."

"Who's my pet?" demanded Prescott in surprise.

"Why, Corporal Overton, of your company."

"Corporal Overton is not my pet, and you'll greatly oblige me by not referring to him again in that fashion, Holmesy," returned the young lieutenant almost stiffly. "Corporal Overton is a mighty fine young soldier, and a good soldier never needs to be his officer's pet; he can stand on his own merits. But what's the trouble with Overton? Is he still absurdly suspected of relieving that simpleton Green of his money?"

"Yes; there's a strong drift of suspicion that way among the men of B Company."

"The idiots!" muttered Prescott impatiently.

"One of my sergeants has just been telling me about Overton's present standing in the company. B Company men have always liked Overton. In fact, he has been well liked all through the battalion, but just now many of

the men don't feel sure about the young fellow," continued Lieutenant Holmes. "Not a man will admit that the case is proved, but a good many of them don't like the looks of things. Especially are the men disturbed by the fact of that revolver being in Corporal Overton's bed, and the fact of his being awake and appearing nervous when the alarm was given."

"Greg, you don't believe Overton stole that simpleton soldier's cash?" cried Prescott.

"I don't, and I won't," Lieutenant Holmes replied. "Overton isn't that type of fellow. He's a soldier all the way through, going and coming, and the first characteristic of a real soldier is honesty."

"Yet you say so many of the men suspect him?" mused Prescott.

"Not exactly that they suspect him, but that they'd like to have the whole matter cleared up and see daylight through it."

"From what I know of soldiers," remarked Lieutenant Prescott thoughtfully, "it looks like a mean mess for Overton. Really, nothing but long time, or complete vindication, will ever put Overton back where he'd like to be in the esteem of all his comrades."

"I know it," agreed Holmes. "That's why I'm telling you all this about one of your own men."

"And I ought to have known it myself," Prescott reproached himself. "I ought not to have waited to get the first strong news from an officer of another company."

"Why, I suppose it was easier for me to get this word than it would have been for you. B Company men are too 'sore' to talk much about it. But C Company men, as it doesn't affect any of them, just treat the whole matter as one of ordinary news."

Lieutenant Dick Prescott rose and began to pace the floor. He was deeply concerned—not so much for Hal Overton's sake as for the general good name of B Company. Moreover, young Prescott knew that, if any man in his company were unjustly suspected, it was his duty, as one of the company officers, to find a way to set the whole matter straight.

"What's all the beastly row about, any way?" queried Lieutenant Algernon Ferrers.

Holmes explained it briefly.

"So it's all a row about some seven hundred dollars, it is?" asked Algy.

"If you choose to put it that way," replied Lieutenant Holmes.

"Then see here, Prescott, old chap," cried Algy eagerly, "why all this rotten fuss? Why, I see the way through it as clear as daylight! I'll set the matter straight in thirty seconds!"

CHAPTER V

CORPORAL HAL'S ADMISSION

LIEUTENANT PRESCOTT paused, looking sharply at Algy.

"Ferrers, if you can see a way through difficulties as easily as you promise, then you're going to be a valuable man for the Army. What's your plan?"

"Why, as I understand it," beamed Ferrers placidly, "the whole trouble is caused by the loss of some seven hundred dollars that the Overton chap got from the simpleton Green?"

"Seven hundred which some men almost suspect that Corporal Overton took from Green," corrected Lieutenant Prescott.

"All the same thing, as far as the really important details go," beamed Algy. "I'll settle it out of hand. You know, dear chaps, the guv'nor owns a few banks in his own name, and he ships me yellow-backs by the case lots. Result is, I always have plenty of money, and am likely to have more than ever now, for there doesn't seem to be much chance in the Army to spend it. So——"

"But what has all this to do with Corporal Overton's unhappy situation?"

"All leads up to the point, Prescott, dear chap," protested Algy. "See how simple it all really is? I can spare seven hundred dollars as well as I can a cigarette. I'll hand the amount to Overton. He'll hand it to Green—and all the cause of the trouble is removed and everybody happy."

"Just like that!" gasped Lieutenant Greg Holmes ironically, and he appeared to need the support of the mantel at which he clutched.

There was a savage look on Lieutenant Prescott's face as he demanded:

"Ferrers, are you trying to make game of me?"

"Make game of you?" echoed Lieutenant Algy, with a face so blank, so full of wonderment and so lacking in guile. "Why, I——"

He broke off abruptly, going to the top drawer of a dresser.

"Money talks," announced Algy, holding out a long wallet. "There's a few thousand dollars in this leather. Help yourself to whatever will square Overton with the individual Green."

"Put your pocketbook up," replied Prescott almost brusquely. "And accept my apology at the same time, Ferrers, if you'll be so good. You weren't trying to make fun of me; I know it now. This is simply another buttered piece off your thick cake of stupidity."

"I've never been noted for cleverness; even the guv'nor admits that to me, in confidence," confessed Lieutenant Algy. "But why won't the money do the trick?"

"Because—oh, why—tell him, won't you, Holmesy? I'm off to see Captain Cortland."

Prescott strode away to his company commander for advice.

"Perhaps you think, sir, I'm a good deal of a fool to take such a keen interest in this matter of Overton," suggested the lieutenant.

"On the contrary, an officer who isn't interested in the men serving under him has done wrongly in choosing the Army for his profession," replied Captain Cortland gravely. "I, too, am disturbed, for, like yourself, Mr. Prescott, I find it impossible to believe that such a clean, clear-cut young soldier as Corporal Overton has been guilty of dishonesty."

"Can you suggest anything that I can do, sir?" the young lieutenant asked gravely.

"I have been thinking over that same matter. It seems difficult to know what to do. Of course you can let Corporal Overton see that he has your confidence, Mr. Prescott. You may assure him, at any time, that he also has mine, if you think that will do him any good. But the only thing that will actually clear up the matter will be the discovery of the real thief—

and that's a matter, I fancy, that's going to be full of difficulty."

Leaving his captain's house, Lieutenant Prescott took a walk along one side of the parade ground. He hoped to encounter Hal, but that young corporal was half a mile away at the time, practising signaling under Sergeant Hupner.

Failing in encountering young Overton, Lieutenant Prescott remembered that Corporal Noll Terry, now in charge at the post telegraph station, was likely to know all about his chum.

Stepping over to the station, where one operator was sending a long military dispatch, while another leaned idly back in his chair, Prescott found Noll at another table, absorbed in the study of an instrument that he had taken to pieces.

"I want to say a few words to you, Corporal Terry," announced the young lieutenant, stepping into a box-like office at the rear of the larger room.

Prescott threw himself down at the desk, while Noll, after saluting, remained standing at attention.

"Close the door, Corporal. That's it. Now, I want to ask you a few questions about your friend Corporal Overton, and the disappearance of Private Green's money."

Noll flushed painfully, though all he answered was:

"Very good, sir."

"Don't misunderstand me, Corporal Terry," went on the young lieutenant. "I am not making an official investigation, and I am not looking for evidence to implicate Corporal Overton in any crime. I don't mind telling you that I haven't a particle of belief in Overton's guilt. The very idea that he would rob any one is opposed to the common sense of any one who really knows your friend and his record."

"Thank you, sir."

This time Noll's face was positively beaming with pleasure.

"So, you see, you don't need to be in the least on your guard in what you may say to me," continued the lieutenant, smiling in his most friendly way. "I don't mind stating, further, that my whole interest in this matter is the interest of an officer who is determined, if possible, to see a good man cleared from suspicion."

"What can I tell you, sir?" Noll asked eagerly.

"Well, Corporal, the worst evidence pointing to any presumption of guilt against your comrade and friend is the finding of the revolver hidden under his bedclothes. What do you think of that incident?"

"Why, I think, sir, that the revolver must

have been slipped in under the bedclothes by some one who wanted to throw all the suspicion on Corporal Overton."

"I agree with you. Now, was that man an actual enemy of Corporal Overton's, or did he merely thrust the revolver into the first bed that he could in passing?"

"My own belief, sir, that an actual enemy of Overton's did it, sir."

"Now, Corporal Terry, who are the men that have cots past Corporal Overton's—that is, past his when traveling away from Green's cot?"

"Hinkey, Clegg, Danes, Potter, Reed, Freeland and myself, sir."

"With which one of the men you have named has Corporal Overton had any trouble, either recently or some time back?"

"With Hinkey, for one, sir."

"What was it over?"

Noll retold the incident of the friendly scuffle between Corporals Overton and Hyman, and the dropping of the signal flag, through a window and upon Private Hinkey's head.

"Had Overton had trouble with other men?"

"Nothing more, sir, than that he had once or twice rebuked Vreeland and Danes for carelessness in squad drill."

"What kind of men are Vreeland and Danes, in your opinion, Corporal?"

"Careless and happy-go-lucky, but good-hearted fellows, sir, and likely to be good soldiers when they've been licked into shape."

"But neither of them is inclined to be dishonest or sulky?"

"From what I have seen of Vreeland and Danes, sir, I am inclined to answer with a very positive 'no.'"

Lieutenant Prescott looked thoughtful, remaining silent for some moments, while Corporal Noll Terry stood looking straight ahead.

"Corporal," said the young officer finally, "Mr. Holmes has told me what a very thorough search was made after the alarm had been given. But no sign of the missing money was found. Have you any idea on that head? Can you make even a plausible suggestion as to how the money was taken care of by the thief?"

"I cannot, sir."

"Have you heard any of the men make reasonable suggestions as to what was done with the money?"

"I think I must have heard all the men in the room talking about it at one time or another, Lieutenant, but the men are puzzled. They cannot account for the complete disappearance of the money."

"Are you keeping your eyes and ears open all the time, for any clue in the matter?"

"Yes, sir!" Noll answered. "And I shan't cease doing so until the whole mystery is cleaned up."

"Good! May I depend upon you, Corporal, to come to me, at any time, with any information that you think will help?"

"Yes, sir; and I thank you for the invitation to do so."

"If I believed Corporal Overton the guilty man, and could find evidence that would prove his guilt and have him bounced out of the service, then I'd do my whole duty," went on Lieutenant Prescott. "But I simply can't believe him guilty, and so I'm prepared to help him at any time when there's the slightest chance."

"May I tell Corporal Overton that, sir?" asked Noll eagerly.

"Yes; but caution him not to mention to others what I have said to you. You are also at liberty to tell Overton that Captain Cortland is wholly convinced of his innocence, and so, I know, is Lieutenant Hampton. But some of the men in the company, and more especially in the squad room, are holding aloof from Corporal Overton, are they not?"

"I wouldn't exactly say that they are doing it in a mean way, sir; but of course soldiers hate thieves, and so the merest taint of a suspicion serves to make some of the men feel rather shy

about having anything unnecessary to do with Corporal Overton."

"Too bad!" murmured Lieutenant Prescott. Then, in his usual official tone:

"That is all, Corporal Terry."

Noll saluted and left the inner office. Almost immediately afterward Lieutenant Prescott sauntered out.

In the meantime, Hal, after some brisk practice at wig-wagging, was on his way back to barracks with Sergeant Hupner.

"You're going to make a real signalman, one of these days, lad," remarked the sergeant, kindly. "You have the speed, and you don't lose any of the clearness of your signaling when you go fast."

"It's great work," smiled Corporal Hal. "Just for the moment it makes me almost sorry that I didn't enlist in the signal corps."

"The infantry is the real branch of the service—the real fighting arm," returned Sergeant Hupner.

"Yes; I know it, and that's the principal reason why I chose the infantry before enlisting."

Together the sergeant and his young corporal entered the barracks, stepping into their own squad room.

There the very first person they met was Private William Green, looking, still, as though he

wanted to burst into tears. Green hadn't smiled once since meeting with his big loss.

"Good afternoon, Sergeant," was Green's greeting. He didn't seem to see Hal at all, a fact that the boyish soldier noted instantly. It cut like a whip to know that Green really suspected his young corporal.

Hal stepped down the length of the squad room. Some of the men greeted him, though none very enthusiastically.

Then Noll came in, drawing his chum aside and detailing the interview with Lieutenant Prescott.

That brightened Hal Overton a good deal. In the middle of the squad room some of the men were having a jolly time, and laughing heartily. Down at the further end of the room, near the door, mournful William Green kept by himself and grieved.

"It's certainly fine to know that one's officers trust him, anyway," Hal declared.

"Oh, this abominable business will all be cleared up before long," Noll Terry predicted cheerily.

"I'd like to believe you," Corporal Hal smiled wistfully.

"Wait and see!"

The merriment in the middle of the room was now going on at its height. Private Clegg,

who was an excellent storyteller, was relating one of his very very best, and it bore on Army life.

Hal and Noll took chairs at one of the writing tables.

A few minutes later a wild whoop sounded from Private William Green.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he yelled, dancing about like a crazy Indian.

"A bat in your belfry? Sure you've got it," yelled Private Clegg.

Sergeant Hupner had run over to where Green was dancing.

"I've got the money. It has come back to me," sang William Green joyously.

In an instant there was a curiosity-inspired rush that every man in the room shared.

Private Green now held high aloft over his head a long envelope whose bulkiness everyone else could see.

"It's the money!" he gasped, chokingly.

"Every man in the room but Green fall in!" roared Sergeant Hupner's voice. "Corporal Terry, take charge of the formation!"

There was a queer, strained hush in the room for the next few moments. Hardly anything was heard but the low breathing of the men, or the few crisp, quiet words of Corporal Noll as he made the men dress their alignment on

Corporal Hal, who stood at the right of the line.

"Hold your men so," nodded Sergeant Hupner tersely. "Now, Green, are you sure you have all your money back?"

"I—I hope so," faltered Green. "The envelope is bulky enough."

"Put it on your cot and let me see it," ordered Hupner.

Green had already broken the flap of the envelope, revealing the edges of a considerable thickness of banknotes.

"Why, there's a note here with the bills," proclaimed the excited soldier.

"What does the note say?"

"It says 'Friend, you'll find all your money here except twenty dollars that I spent. Meant to keep it all, but found stolen money brings no pleasure. Hope you'll forgive me.' "

"What does the writing look like?" demanded Sergeant Hupner.

"It ain't written; it's printed," replied Private Green. "Here, take the note and look at it."

Sergeant Hupner did glance at the note briefly, but here he felt he would find no clue. After all, a man's printing does not closely resemble his writing.

"Anything written on the envelope?" de-

manded the sergeant, holding out his hand. Yes; the envelope contained the inscription, "Pvt. Wm. Green." That was all; but it wasn't printed. The words were written in bold, flowing handwriting. Sergeant Hupner felt a throb as he glanced at the handwriting on that envelope. But he knew his duty.

"Corporal Terry, go to the nearest window and have the sentry pass the word for the corporal of the guard!"

Then Hupner asked one more question:

"Green, where and how did you find this envelope?"

"Just the moment before I helloed. It was tucked inside my bedding, so that just the end of the envelope showed."

Quickly the corporal of the guard was on hand, accompanied by two privates of the guard. Sergeant Hupner explained what had happened, adding:

"Corporal, I think you'd better send for the officer of the day."

That officer of the day, who shortly arrived, was Lieutenant Ray of C company.

He listened gravely, while Sergeant Hupner told the story, then asked a few questions of Private Green.

"Sergeant," directed Lieutenant Ray, "start the envelope passing down the line. Each man

is to look at the handwriting, and state whether he recognizes it."

All this time the men had remained standing in line, though at ease.

Sergeant Hupner, with a queer look, passed the envelope to Corporal Hal Overton, who stood at the right of the line.

The instant he glanced at the writing Hal started, then changed color.

"Do you know the writing on that envelope, Corporal Overton?" demanded the officer of the day, eyeing the young soldier.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you positive that you know whose writing it is, Corporal Overton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whose?"

"Mine, sir," replied Corporal Hal.

CHAPTER VI

THE SQUAD ROOM TURNS COLD

ON the listening men the effect of this admission was that of a bombshell.

Yet, because they were soldiers, they took their bombshell quietly.

Lieutenant Ray was astounded, yet his voice did not quiver as he asked, briskly:

"Then, Corporal Overton, you admit having addressed the envelope?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Don't trifle with me, Corporal!"

"I am not, sir."

"Yet you admit having addressed it?"

"Yes, sir; I believe this to be my writing beyond a doubt. Yet, sir, I have no recollection of having written this address. All I know is that it is my handwriting."

"Sergeant, dismiss your men," directed Lieutenant Ray, as he reached out and took the envelope. "Corporal Overton, you will not leave the room."

"Is the corporal under arrest, sir?" asked Sergeant Hupner, in a quiet voice.

"No, Sergeant. But I wish to have him immediately at hand, in case the company, battalion or regimental commanders wish to see him. When the men fall in for supper formation, if Corporal Overton has not been summoned by an officer, then let him march to mess with the rest, but he must return here immediately after the meal."

"Very good, sir."

Lieutenant Ray withdrew, followed by the corporal and privates of the guard.

"I am not forbidden to speak to other men, am I, Sergeant?" asked Hal Overton, going directly up to him.

"You are not in any sense in arrest, Corporal," replied Hupner, then adding, in a lower voice:

"And I hope you'll do some mighty hard thinking, lad, and be able to give a very straight account about that envelope."

"Sergeant, as I am in no way guilty of any part in the robbery, I do not believe that there will be much trouble about being able to make an explanation when I have had time to think."

"I hope you're right, Overton, for I haven't an idea in the world that you are, or could be, a thief."

"Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, Sergeant."

"Private William Green sat on a stool near the head of his cot, counting his recovered money for the third time."

"Is it all there, Green?" asked Corporal Hal, going over to the soldier.

"All but the twenty dollars that it is supposed to be shy," replied Green rather gruffly and without looking up.

"Green, I hope you haven't an idea that I'm the crook," Hal went on.

"Of course not. But there's a stack of appearances against you, just the same," replied William Green dryly.

"See here!" Hal spoke sharply, the pain ringing in his voice. "Do you really believe that I stole your money in the first place?"

"I've got most of it back, and I'd rather not express any opinions, Corporal," was Green's evasive reply.

Just at this instant Corporal Noll Terry joined the pair.

"William," chuckled Noll, "the men have got up a new name for you. Instead of calling you William Green they're going to nickname you 'Long Green' after this."

"Let 'em," grunted Private Green briefly, and without a sign of understanding the slangy joke.

Hal turned away, a choking feeling in his

throat, though his outward demeanor was brave enough.

"Clegg, and the rest of you," began Overton, stopping by a group of the soldiers, "will you all do your best to try to remember some time when I may have had occasion to address an envelope to Green?"

Clegg stopped talking with his comrades, half-wheeled about, looked the young corporal steadily in the eyes, then turned back once more to carry on his talk with the other soldiers.

Hal Overton's face went deathly pale.

This was the direct cut, the snub, from his mates of the squad room.

After that Hal would make no advances to any man in the room who did not first signify that he believed in the hapless corporal.

"Don't mind 'em, Hal," muttered Noll soothingly, coming up behind his bunkie at the far end of the squad room. "They're only human, and you will have to admit that, just for the moment, all things being taken into consideration, that appearances do hit you a bit. But the whole thing will all be straightened out before long."

"Will it?" asked Hal almost listlessly. He had to speak thus, to prevent the sob in his throat from getting into his voice. For, soldier though he was, and a rarely good one, he was

still only a boy in years, and this air of suspicion in the squad room made all life look wholly dark to him.

"Surely all will come right," insisted Noll. "You've plenty of good friends around here."

"You and Sergeant Hupner," smiled Corporal Overton bitterly. "But at least, old chap, you two make up in quality what you lack in numbers."

The call for mess formation rang at last. Corporal Hal went to his place in the company line as briskly as ever.

Just as the men were passing Corporal Hyman hit Hal a clip on the shoulder.

"Buck up, old spinal trouble!" urged Hyman heartily, in a low voice. "Don't disappoint every friend and true believer you've got."

There were a few others who were openly friendly in the company mess, but Hal could force only a few mouthfuls of food and a cup of tea down his throat that night.

At a little after eight o'clock an orderly of the guard came striding into the squad room to inform Overton that Colonel North would see him at the officers' club.

Thither Hal went. When he reported he was directed to a little smoking room that stood just off the dining room. When Hal knocked and entered at command he found Colonel North

there, flanked by Major Silsbee and B company's officers.

Colonel North had the accusing envelope and the note in the printed scrawl in his hand.

"Come in, Corporal," called the regimental commander. "I sent for you to inquire whether you have yet thought of any way of accounting for this envelope being in your handwriting."

"I have not, sir," Hal answered.

"Take the envelope and look at it."

Hal Overton obeyed.

"Do you think it likely, Corporal, that the writing on that envelope is a forged imitation of your own handwriting?"

"It is possible, sir, of course," Hal made frank, direct reply. "Yet, sir, I am inclined to believe that the writing is really mine."

"Hand me back the envelope. Now, go to the table over there, where you will find an envelope. Take up the pen and direct another envelope in just the words that this is addressed."

"I've done so, sir," replied Hal, a moment later.

"Now in the lower corner of the envelope write the words, 'My own writing, Overton.'"

"Yes, sir; I've done it."

"Bring the envelope to me, Corporal Overton."

Colonel North now compared the writing on the two envelopes, then passed them to the other officers present, who carefully examined these exhibits.

"The writings look identical, sir," was Captain Cortland's comment.

"Yes," agreed Major Silsbee. The other younger officers nodded.

"Corporal," went on Colonel North—and now there was a world of real sympathy in his voice as he looked at this fine young soldier—"this is a very painful happening. Some slight, surface indications are against you, but to me it looks as though some one else had hatched up the circumstances so that they would seem bound to smite you. Of course, to everyone but yourself, there is a possibility that you may be guilty. It may please you, however, to know, Corporal, that you still possess the confidence of all your officers."

"Then, sir, I thank all my officers."

"In this country, Corporal," continued Colonel North, "every man is presumed innocent until he has been proven guilty. In your own case you are not only not proven guilty, but you are not even accused. Nor, on any such evidence as we yet have before us could any accusation be made with any hope of being able to prove you guilty. I do not for a moment be-

lieve you guilty. You have too fine a record as a soldier for any such belief to find acceptance without the strongest, most positive proof."

"There is something that Captain Cortland and I have had in mind to do for you. The present time, therefore, seems an especially suitable one for showing the full measure of our confidence in you, Corporal. Of course, if any evidence came up that would sustain a charge of crime against you, then what we are thinking of doing could be very easily undone at need. Corporal Overton, at parade, to-morrow afternoon, your appointment as sergeant in B company will be announced."

Hal started, colored, then turned pale.

"I—I thank you, sir," he stammered. "But —but——"

"Well, my man?" inquired the colonel kindly.

"Pardon me, sir, but wouldn't the appointment be better made at some later date?"

"Why?" shot out Colonel North.

"I fear I may not have as much force with a squad room as a sergeant should have, sir."

"Then you will have to develop that force," replied Colonel North dryly. "It's in you, I know."

Poor Hal! At any other time this much-wanted promotion would have been hailed joyfully. Now it seemed almost like wormwood.

CHAPTER VII

RACKING THE NEW SERGEANT

"CORPORAL OVERTON, B company, is hereby appointed a sergeant in the same company, the appointment to take effect immediately. Sergeant Overton's company commander will assign him to the charge of a squad room in B company."

That was published with the orders the very next afternoon, at parade.

It came with startling suddenness to most of the men in B company. Noll was the only one who had been warned in advance, and he had held his peace.

Only one other man in the battalion had known it, and that was Grimes, the grimly silent private who sold goods in the quartermaster's store. Of Grimes, Hal had already purchased the necessary sergeant chevrons that he might have them ready.

"On dismissal of the company Sergeant Overton will at once report to me," announced Captain Cortland.

Hal, therefore, on falling out of ranks, went directly to his company commander, saluting.

"You are to have charge of the squad room

next to Sergeant Hupner's," began the captain, pleasantly.

"Very good, sir."

"And now, my lad, don't feel at all down cast over some circumstances that have come up in barracks," continued the captain, resting a friendly hand on the new young sergeant's shoulder. "Take firm charge of your squad room from the outset. Force your men to respect as well as obey you. You will have all the necessary countenance of your officers. Do your duty as a soldier, as you have always done, and do not allow yourself to entertain fears of any kind."

"Thank you, sir. I shall do as you direct."

"I know it, Sergeant Overton. I have confidence in you. Now, I am going to step down to your new squad room with you."

If Hal Overton quaked just a bit as he rested his right hand on the door of the room in which he was henceforth to rule, nothing in his bearing betrayed the fact.

He threw open the door for Captain Cortland to pass in ahead of him, at the same time calling clearly:

"Squad room, attention!"

Captain Cortland strode in among his men, who, halting where they were, faced toward him and stood at attention.

"Men," called Captain Cortland, "this is your new sergeant. He will be obeyed and respected accordingly."

Then Captain Cortland turned and left the room.

Corporal Hyman, who belonged in this room, came forward at once, holding out his hand.

"Aren't you the lucky one, Sergeant!" cried Hyman. "But I'm glad you got the step up. You've won it. Well, we're all here. Fall to and reorganize, us, Sergeant."

"There will have to be very little of that, I imagine, Corporal Hyman," replied the boyish young sergeant, smiling. "The room has been running all right, hasn't it?"

"So-so," laughed Corporal Hyman. "But I believe that some of these buck doughboys need a bit of jacking up."

Corporal Hyman turned, with a grinning face, toward the men. But none of them were looking that way at the moment. Every other man in the room appeared interested in some other subject than the new sergeant.

"Go for 'em," muttered Hyman grimly under his breath. "It's a shame for you to have to stand for this sort of thing, kid! Pound 'em into shape. Make 'em stand around for you."

"I will, in matters of discipline and routine, whenever necessary," Sergeant Hal answered,

in an equally low voice. "But if the men don't care for me personally that's another matter. I'll never persecute any soldier just because he doesn't like me."

"It's all that cursed misunderstanding over 'Long Green,'" muttered Corporal Hyman. "Of course you can't very well make a yell about it, but I see several fights on my hands from right now on, until I've gotten these buck doughboys licked into a proper appreciation of the new boss of their squad room."

"Don't have any fights on my account, Hyman," urged Sergeant Hal.

"Well, I won't, then," came the dry retort. "I'll have a few good fights on my own account, then, for it's a personal grievance when the men turn down a man that I like."

The conversation was interrupted, at that moment, by the in-coming of First Sergeant Gray.

"I'm glad over your rise, Overton," beamed the first sergeant. "And it has come quickly. I'm here to warn you for guard duty. You'll report at guard mount to-morrow morning as sergeant of the guard."

"That does come rather speedily, doesn't it?" laughed Hal. "Who is to be officer of the day to-morrow?"

"Lieutenant Ferrers," responded Sergeant Gray gravely.

"What? The joke to be officer of the day?" exploded Corporal Hyman.

"Corporal," came the first sergeant's swift, serious rebuke, "whenever you allude to your superior officers you'll do so with the utmost respect."

"My flag's down," replied Corporal Hyman. "I surrender. But, Sergeant, is there anything in the blue book of rules against my going away in a corner for a quiet laugh."

"No," rejoined Sergeant Gray stiffly, and Hyman left them.

"Of course you understand, Sergeant Overton," went on Sergeant Gray, "that a little more than the usual responsibility will devolve upon you to-morrow. You know how new Lieutenant Ferrers is to the Army. You may be able quietly to prevent him from doing something foolish—some little hint that you can give him you know."

"I'll have my eyes open," Sergeant Hal promised.

Sergeant Gray warned two other men in the room to report for guard duty in the morning, then went to Sergeant Hupner's room to warn others. Hal turned out the squad at mess call. By this time the new young sergeant had sewed on his new chevron, the outward sign of his promotion.

Through most of the evening Hal and Hyman sat apart by one of the writing tables, chatting by themselves. Since the men had shown open dislike of the new sergeant Hal did not force himself upon them. Finally, however, the fun started by some of the men becoming altogether too rough and noisy.

"Squad room attention!" shouted Sergeant Hal, leaping to his feet. Corporal Hyman, too, jumped up.

All of the men came instantly to attention. Some of them looked merely curious, but a few glared back at their new sergeant.

"Some of you men have been more noisy and rough than is warranted by a proper sense of freedom in barracks," Hal said quietly but firmly. "Fun may go on, but all real disorder will cease at once, and not be resumed. That is all."

Hal turned to resume his seat at the table. But from three or four men in the center of the room, as they turned away, came a muffled groan.

That sign of insubordination brought the young sergeant to his feet once more in an instant. His under lip trembled slightly, but he strode in among the men.

"Men, I've something to say to you," announced the new sergeant coolly. "I intend to

preserve discipline in this squad room, though I don't expect to do it like a martinet. Some of you groaned, just now, when my back was turned. Soldiers of the regular Army are men of courage. No real man fights behind another man's back. Has any man here anything that he wishes to say to my face?"

It was a tense moment. Three or four of the men looked as though tempted to "say a lot."

Sergeant Hal, his hands tightly gripped, stood facing them, waiting.

Nearly a score of feet away Corporal Hyman stood negligently by. There was nothing aggressive in his manner, but he was ready to go to the support of his sergeant.

"Has any man here anything that he wishes to say to me?" Hal repeated.

Still silence was preserved.

"Then let us have no more child's play by those who are old enough to be men twenty-four hours in a day," warned Overton crisply.

He hadn't said much, but his look, his tone and manner told the men that he was in command in that room, and that he intended to keep the command fully in his own hands.

There was no further trouble that night, though the young sergeant could not escape the knowledge that he was generally disliked here.

When guard-mounting assembly sounded at

nine the next morning Sergeant Hal Overton marched the new guard on to the field.

Battalion Adjutant Wright was on hand, but Lieutenant Algy Ferrers, the new officer of the day, was absent.

The adjutant turned, scanning the ground between there and officers' row. There was no sign of Lieutenant Ferrers, and in the Army lack of punctuality, even to the fraction of a minute, is a grave offense.

"Orderly," directed Adjutant Wright, turning to a man, "go to Lieutenant Ferrers' quarters and direct him, with my compliments, to come here as quickly as he possibly can."

The orderly departed on a run. But he soon came back, alone.

"Sir, Lieutenant Ferrers is not in his quarters?"

"Not in quarters? Did you look in at the officers' club, too?"

"Yes, sir. Lieutenant Ferrers' bed was not slept in last night, so his striker told me."

Adjutant Wright fumed inwardly, though he turned to Hal to say:

"Sergeant, inspect the guard."

A little later Hal marched his new guard down to the guard house. Lieutenant Ferrers had not yet been found, and there was a storm brewing.

CHAPTER VIII

ASTONISHMENT JOLTS MR. FERRERS

IT was nearly four in the afternoon when the sentry on post number one called briskly:

"Sergeant of the guard, post number one!"

"What is it, sentry?" asked Hal, stepping briskly out of the guard house.

"Lieutenant Ferrers is approaching, Sergeant," replied the sentry, nodding his head down the road.

An auto car bowled leisurely up the road toward the main entrance to the post. In it, at the wheel, sat Lieutenant Algy Ferrers, who was supposed to be officer of the day. He was driving the one car that he had been allowed to store on post.

Algy looked decidedly tired and bored as he drove along.

"Halt the lieutenant, sentry."

"Very good, Sergeant."

Just as the lieutenant turned his car in at the gate, the sentry, instead of coming to present arms, threw his gun over to port arms, calling:

"Halt, sir. Sergeant of the guard, post number one."

Algy, with a look of astonishment on his face, slowed the car down and stopped. Sergeant Hal approached, giving him the rifle salute.

"Well, what's in the wind, Sergeant?" demanded Algy, reaching in a pocket for his cigarette case.

"I beg your pardon for stopping you, sir, but the adjutant directed me to ask you to report to him immediately upon your return, sir."

"All right; I'll drop around and see Wright as soon as I put my car up and get a bath," replied Lieutenant Algy, striking a match.

"Beg your pardon, sir; don't light that cigarette until you've driven on."

"Now how long since sergeants have taken to giving officers orders?" inquired Mr. Ferrers in very great astonishment.

"The guard always has power to enforce the rules, sir. And smoking is forbidden when addressing the guard on official business."

"Oh, I daresay you're right, Sergeant," assented Algy, dropping his match out of the car. "Very good; I'll see Wright within an hour or so."

"But the order was explicit, sir, that you are to report to the adjutant at once. If you'll pardon the suggestion, Lieutenant, I think it will be better, sir, if you drive straight to the adjutant's office.

"Oh, all right," nodded Algy indifferently. " 'Pon my word, it takes a fellow quite a while to get hold of some of these peculiar Army customs. Even an officer is likely to be ordered about a good deal as though he were a dog. Eh, Sergeant?"

"I have never felt like a dog, sir, since entering the Army."

Oh, I dare say Wright is quite proper in his order, you know. I'll go up and drop in on him right now."

Both sergeant and sentry saluted again as this very unusual officer turned on the speed and went driving lazily up to headquarters' building.

Algy Ferrers had his cigarette going by the time that he stepped leisurely into the adjutant's office.

"Some one told me you wanted to see me, Wright," began Algy.

Lieutenant Wright wheeled around briskly upon his subordinate.

"I want to see you, Mr. Ferrers, only to pass you on to the colonel. I'll tell him that you're here."

Adjutant Wright stepped into the inner office, nodding his head at the colonel, then wheeled about.

"Colonel North will see you, sir."

Algy took three quick whiffs of his cigarette, then tossed it away. He had already gained an idea that a young officer does not go into his colonel's presence smoking.

"So you're here, sir?" demanded Colonel North, looking up from his desk as Algy came to a halt before him.

"Yes; I'm here, Colonel—or most of me is. My, how seedy I feel this afternoon! Do you know, Colonel, I'm almost persuaded to cut out social——"

"Silence, Mr. Ferrers!" commanded Colonel North very coldly. "Concern yourself only with answering my questions. Yesterday afternoon you were warned that you would be officer of the day to-day."

"Bless me, so I was," assented Algy mildly.

"Yet this morning you failed to be present at guard-mount."

"Yes, sir. I'll tell you how it happened."

"Be good enough to tell me without delay."

"Colonel, did you ever hear of the Douglas-Fraziers, of Detroit?"

"Answer my question, Mr. Ferrers!"

"Or the Porterby-Masons, of Chicago?" pursued Algy calmly. "Both families are very old friends of our family. They and some others were very much interested in my being a soldier, and——"

"You being a soldier!" exploded the irate colonel under his breath.

"And so they and some others who were on their way to the coast on a special train had their train switched off at Clowdry last night. They expected to get in at eight, but it was eleven when they arrived last night. However, sir, they telephoned right up to me and tipped me off to join them at once at the Clowdry Hotel. So what could I do?"

"Eh?" quivered Colonel North, who seemed momentarily all but bereft of speech.

"What could I do, sir? Of course I couldn't turn down such old friends. Besides, there were some fine girls with the party. And it was too late, Colonel, to go waking you over the telephone, so I just went down to the quartermaster's stable and got my car out and was mighty soon in Clowdry."

"There might have been nothing very serious in that, Mr. Ferrers, had you returned in time for guard-mount this morning."

"But I simply couldn't. Don't you understand?" pleaded Algy with good-natured patience.

"No, sir! I don't understand!" thundered Colonel North. "All I understand, sir, is that you have disgraced yourself and your regiment by failing to report as the officer of the day."

"Let me explain, sir," went on Algy, with a slight wave of his hand. "When I got to the hotel the Douglas-Fraziers had ordered dinner. They were starved. I had a pretty good appetite myself. Dinner lasted until half past one. Then we had a jolly time, some of the girls singing in the hotel parlor. After they'd turned in, between three and four in the morning, the men insisted on hearing how well I was coming along in the Army."

"They did?" inquired the colonel, with an irony that was wholly thrown away on Algy.

"Yes, sir. And then we sat down to play cards. First thing we knew it was ten in the morning. Then we had breakfast, and the ladies got downstairs before the meal was over. The Douglas-Frazier train couldn't pull out until three thirty this afternoon. So, after they'd gone to so much trouble to see me, and had put up such a ripping time for me, of course I had to stay in town to see them off."

"Naturally," assented Colonel North with fine sarcasm.

"I am glad you understand it, Colonel, and so there's not a bit of harm done, after all. I'm an ignoramus about guard duty, anyway, and I'll wager the guard got on better without me, after all. And now, Colonel, since I've given you a wholly satisfactory explanation as to why I

simply couldn't be here to-day, if you've nothing more to say to me, sir, I'll go to my quarters, get into my bath and then tumble into bed, for I'm just about dead for slee——"

Colonel North rose fiercely, looking as though he were threatened with an attack of apoplexy.

"Stop all your idiotic chatter, Mr. Ferrers, and listen to me with whatever little power of concentration you may possess. Your conduct, sir, has been wholly unfitting an officer and a gentleman. If I did my full duty I'd order you in arrest at once, and have you brought to trial before a general court-martial. You have visited upon yourself a disgrace that you can't wipe out in a year. You have—but what's the use? You wouldn't understand!"

"I'm a little dull just now, sir," agreed Algy. "But after a bath and a long night's sleep I'll be as fresh as ever."

"You'll have neither bath nor sleep!" retorted the colonel testily. "You'll go to your quarters and get into your uniform without a moment's delay. You'll be back here in fifteen minutes, or I'll order you in arrest. And you'll finish out your tour of guard duty. You'll be on duty and awake, sir, until the old guard goes off to-morrow morning. More, you'll remain all that time at the guard house, so that the sergeant of the guard can be sure that you are awake."

"Good heavens!" murmured Algy.

"Further, Mr. Ferrers, until further orders, you will not step off the limits of the post without express permission from either myself or Major Silsbee. Now, go to your quarters, sir—and don't dare to be gone more than fifteen minutes."

Lieutenant Prescott, hearing some one move in Mr. Ferrers' rooms, looked in inquiringly.

"Oh, but I'm in an awful hurry. I've got to get back to that beastly colonel," explained Algy.

"Beastly? Colonel North is a fine old brick!" retorted Prescott indignantly.

"Well, he has an—er—most peculiar temper at times," insisted Algy. "Why, he seemed positively annoyed because I had obeyed the social instinct and had gone away to meet old friends of our family."

"Have you any idea what you did to-day?" demanded Lieutenant Prescott. "Ferrers, you've been guilty of conduct that is sufficient to get an officer kicked out of the service for good and all."

"And just between ourselves, sputtered Algy, "I don't believe the officer would lose much by the operation. Have you any idea of the social importance of the Douglas-Fraziers and of the——"

"Oh, hang the Douglas-Fraziers and all their works," uttered Prescott disgustedly. "Algy, are you ever going to become a soldier?"

"You're as bad as the colonel!" muttered Ferrers. "What the Army needs is a little more exact understanding of social life and its obligations."

"Let me help you on with your sword," interrupted Prescott dryly. "You're getting it tangled up between your legs."

"I'm excited, that's why," returned Ferrers. "It all comes of having a colonel who understands nothing of the social life. There; now I'm ready, and I must get away on the bounce."

"I'll walk along with you and explain the nature of your offense of to-day, if you don't mind," proposed Prescott.

Algy Ferrers reported at Colonel North's office and soon came out.

"Now I'm off," cried Ferrers gayly, as he came out again.

"I don't believe you've ever been anything else but 'off,' " murmured Prescott, as he stood in front of headquarters and watched Algy, who was actually walking briskly.

As Lieutenant Prescott stood there Colonel North came out. The younger officer wheeled, saluting respectfully.

"Mr. Prescott, if you've nothing important

on this evening, will you drop down to the guard house for a little while? You may be able to prevent Mr. Ferrers from doing something that will compel me to resort to almost as strong measures as I would adopt with a really responsible being."

"Yes, sir; I'll pay Mr. Ferrers a visit soon after dinner."

"Of course, the young man has to break in at guard duty some time," continued the regiment's commander. "But I am very glad to know that young Overton is sergeant of the guard to-night. He will prevent anyone from stealing the guard house!"

"I rather think Sergeant Overton would, sir. He's pretty young, but he's an all-around soldier."

"I wish," muttered the colonel, as he turned to stride toward his own quarters, "that Overton were the lieutenant and Mr. Ferrers the sergeant. Then I could reduce Ferrer and get the surgeon to order him into hospital!"

CHAPTER IX

PRIVATE HINKEY DELIVERS HIS ANSWER

THANKS to a most capable sergeant of the guard, Lieutenant Algy got through his balance of the tour of guard duty without setting the post on fire.

There was no rest, however, for the irresponsible young lieutenant.

For three successive mornings Ferrers had to grub hard at drill, with Lieutenant Prescott standing by to coach him.

Then, on the fourth morning, Lieutenant Algy was ordered out to take A Company on a twenty-mile hike over rough country.

"Sergeant Reed knows the whole route and will be a most capable guide, Mr. Ferrers," explained Captain Ruggles. "We shall look for you to be back by five o'clock this afternoon. Don't use your men too hard. Now, I'll stand by to see you start the company."

With a brave determination to show how worthy he was of trust, Lieutenant Algy stepped briskly over to A Company, which rested in ranks in platoon front. Drawing his sword, he commanded:

"Attention!"

Thereupon he put the company through half a dozen movements of the manual of arms, next marching the company away in column of fours. The regulars, of course, responded like clockwork. They made a fine appearance as they started off under their freakish second lieutenant. Ere they had gone far Ferrers swung them into column of twos at the route step.

"He's doing that almost well," muttered Captain Ruggles under his breath. "I believe the young cub is trying to be a soldier, after all."

It still lacked much of two in the afternoon when Captain Ruggles, leaving his quarters, saw his company marching back.

"Gracious! How did the youngster ever get the men over the ground in this time?" wondered Captain Ruggles, glancing at his watch. "And he hasn't used the company up, either. The men move as actively as though they had just come from bed and a bath."

Captain Ruggles walked rapidly over toward barracks. Lieutenant Ferrers threw his company into column of platoons, faced them about and brought the men to a halt. Then he wheeled about, saluting Captain Ruggles.

"Any further orders, sir?" inquired Algy.

"No, Lieutenant. Dismiss the company."

As soon as the men had started barrackwards, Captain Ruggles asked the lieutenant:

"How did you manage it, Ferrers, to bring the men back in such fine condition and so early in the day?"

"Just a matter of good judgment, Captain," beamed Algy.

"What do you mean?"

"I changed the orders a bit, sir, to meet the conditions that I discovered."

"Conditions?"

"Yes, Captain. The day proved to be extremely warm. I marched the men for about six miles; it may have been nearer seven. Curiously enough, Sergeant Reed and I disagreed on that point. He said we had gone about a mile and a half."

"Well? What next?"

"Why, sir, I found it so warm that I couldn't march with any comfort at all. Now, I don't believe an officer should expect his men to go where he isn't willing to go himself, and as for myself I didn't want to go any further. So I halted the company and ——"

"And——"

"Why, Captain," smiled Lieutenant Ferrers, "I just let the men enjoy themselves under the trees until it was time to have their dinner on the field rations they'd taken along."

"And then?"

"Why, then, sir, I marched them back here.

I'll take them out again some day when the weather is cooler, and——"

Captain Ruggles acted a good deal like a man who is about to lose his temper.

"Mr. Ferrers," came his rasping order, "go to your rooms! Remain there until you hear from Colonel North, Major Silsbee or myself."

"Why, what on earth have I done now?" gasped the astonished young man.

"Go to your rooms, sir!"

"Now, what ails good old Ruggles? Isn't the Army the queerest old place on the map of the moon?"

Within fifteen minutes Algy Ferrers, sitting back in an easy chair in his quarters, glancing out of a window with a look of absolute boredom, receive a telephone call.

"Colonel North's compliments, and will you come to his house at once?" was the brief message.

"Now, I shouldn't wonder if old Ruggles had forgotten to mind his own business," muttered Algy disconsolately, as he reached for his fatigue cap.

"Mr. Ferrers," was the colonel's stern greeting, "every day your conduct becomes more incomprehensible!"

"And every day, sir, I might say," retorted the young man pleasantly, "the Army becomes

harder to understand. I don't wish to be guilty of any impertinence, sir, but wouldn't it be well to have a law enacted that officers from civil life should be appointed wholly from clerks, who have learned how to keep office hours and never do any thinking for themselves?"

"There might be some advantage in that plan, Mr. Ferrers," replied the colonel grimly. "And I can't help feeling that you would give infinitely more satisfaction here if you had first been trained a bit in one of your father's many offices. I don't suppose you have the least idea, sir, of what a grave offense you have committed to-day?"

"I expected to be praised, sir," replied Algy almost testily, "for having been highly humane to the men under my command."

"Humane!" exploded Colonel North. "Bah! Mr. Ferrers, do you imagine that our regulars are so many weaklings, that they have to come in when it rains, or stay in when the sun shines? Bah! You have been guilty of gross disobedience of orders, and you are an officer, sir—supposed to be engaged in teaching obedience to enlisted men. That is all, sir—you may go to your quarters!"

By the time that young Mr. Ferrers reached his own quarters he found Lieutenant Prescott there, though the latter did not say a word about

Colonel North having ordered him to make the call.

Algy immediately started in upon what was, for him, a furious tirade.

"Do you know, dear chap," he wound up, "I can't always understand a man like old Papa North. Sometimes I think he's just a beast!"

But Prescott's laughing advice was:

"Hold yourself in, Ferrers; your hoops are cracked."

"Bah!" stormed Lieutenant Algy. "An Army post is a crazy place for a fellow to go when looking for sympathy or reason."

In the meantime A Company's men had spread the joke through enlisted men's barracks.

"What's the use?" growled Private Hinkey to a group of private soldiers. "Ferrers is just a plumb fool, and all the colonels in the world can't ever make anything else of him. Ferrers is a born idiot!"

Sergeant Hal Overton paused just at the edge of the group.

"Hinkey," the boyish non-com. observed dryly, "if that's your opinion, you'll show a lot of wisdom and good sense in keeping it to yourself."

"Oh, you shut up!" sneered Hinkey. "No one spoke to you. Move on. Your opinions are not wanted here."

Words cannot convey the intent in Hickey's words, though it was plain enough to all who stood near by.

Hinkey plainly sought to convey that no man in barracks had any use for Sergeant Overton, a man as good as convicted of having robbed Private William Green.

Nor did Hal, by any means, miss the intended slur. Yet he was above taking up any quarrel on personal grounds.

"Hinkey," rebuked the young sergeant, "you're not answering a non-commissioned officer with the proper amount of respect."

"What's the use?" jeered the ugly soldier. "I don't feel any."

"Silence, my man!"

"Then since you're putting on airs just because of your chevrons, you'd better set an example of silence yourself. Then your lesson will wash down all the better."

The other soldiers in the group took no part in the conversation. They did not attempt to "show sides," but Sergeant Hal knew that they were looking on and listening with keen interest.

It would never do for this boy who was a sergeant to "back down" before such an affront, both to himself and to good discipline.

"He's trying to make me mad, so that I'll make it seem like a personal affair," thought

Hal Overton swiftly. "I'll keep cool and fool the fellow!"

Hinkey, after glaring defiantly and contemptuously at the young sergeant, turned on his heel and started away.

"Halt, there, my man!" ordered Sergeant Hal coolly, yet at the same time sternly.

Hinkey kept on as though he had not heard.

Without an instant's hesitation, his manner still cool but his face white and set, Sergeant Overton leaped after his man, laying a hand heavily on the private's shoulder.

"I halted you, my man!"

"Did you?" said Hinkey. "I didn't hear it."

With that, he slipped out from under Hal Overton's detaining grasp, turned his back and once more started onward.

"Careful there, Hinkey!" called one of the soldiers warningly.

But the sullen soldier was now beyond any sense of caution.

As Hal again grabbed him, this time with both hands, and swinging him about, Hinkey thrust his face menacingly close to Overton's.

"What do you want, Overton? Maybe I've got it."

"Attention!"

"I'm listening," growled Hinkey, his whole carriage slouching.

"Stand at attention!"

"Hinkey, you're wholly disrespectful and insubordinate!"

Out of the corner of his eye the soldier saw his late companions silently drawing nearer.

"If I'm disrespectful, I'm disrespectful to nothing!" he retorted derisively.

Then he added with more insulting directness:

"Or to less than nothing!"

"Hinkey, are you going to stand at attention and be silent until I'm through with you?"

"No!"

Again he tried to free himself from the boyish sergeant's grasp, but this time he found it harder than he had expected.

"Stand at attention, man!"

"I'll see you in Tophet first! And take your hands off of me, unless you want to start trouble at once!"

"Hinkey, you are making a fearful mistake in forgetting yourself! I'll give you this one chance to come to your senses."

"And if you don't take your hands off of me you'll lose your senses—if you ever had any!"

Hal's answer was to tighten his grip until the other winced. Then Private Hinkey delivered his answer. Suddenly wrenching himself free, by the exercise of his full strength, he let his fist fly at Sergeant Overton's face.

CHAPTER X

SERGEANT OVERTON AND DISCIPLINE

JUST how it all happened Private Hinkey was never afterwards able to figure out to his own satisfaction.

Instead of his blow landing, the soldier found himself on his own back on the grass—and he fell with a bump that jarred him.

"You chevroned cur! I'll make you eat that blow!" yelled Hinkey, beside himself with rage.

Then he leaped to his feet, fairly quivering with the great passion that had seized him.

"Slosson! Kelly! Take hold of Hinkey! He's under arrest," announced the boyish sergeant.

Hinkey made a dive at Hal, but the two soldiers, hearing themselves summoned, and knowing the penalties of disobedience, threw themselves between the sulky brute and the sergeant.

"Let me at him!" screamed Hinkey, struggling with the two comrades who now held him.

"Be silent, you fool!" warned Slosson. "You'll get yourself in stiff before you know what you're about."

"What do I care?" panted Hinkey. "The cur coward! He doesn't dare face me."

"If the sergeant came at ye once wid his fists, ye'd know better—as soon as ye knew anything," jeered Private Kelly.

"The sarge is a scrapper—few like him in 'ours' when he turns himself loose," supplemented Slosson.

"Then let go of me, and let the cur turn himself loose," pleaded Hinkey, fighting furiously with his captors. "Let him show me if he dares."

Into such a passion was he working himself that Hinkey seemed likely to tear himself away from the two soldiers who sought to restrain him.

But Hal had sense enough to keep his own hands out of the affair.

"Meade, get in there and help," he directed.

Then, with Hinkey growing rapidly angrier and putting forth more strength, there was battle royal.

When it was over Hinkey had a bleeding nose, a cut lip, one eye closed and his uniform all but torn from him.

But he panted and surrendered, at last—a prisoner.

"What's this all about, Sergeant Overton?" demanded First Sergeant Gray, hastening to the spot.

"I've placed Hinkey under arrest, Sergeant,

for disrespectful speech against an officer, for disrespectful answers to myself and for insubordination."

"You wouldn't act without strong cause, I know, Sergeant Overton," replied First Sergeant Gray. "Hustle Private Hinkey down to the guard house, then."

"Forward with him, men," ordered Hal.

Hinkey would have started the fight all over again, but he realized the weight of discipline and numbers, and felt that it would give his enemy too much satisfaction.

So, with much growling and many oaths, Hinkey submitted to being marched down to the guard house.

To the sergeant of the guard Hal explained the charge. The sergeant of the guard promptly sent for Lieutenant Hayes, of C Company, who was officer of the day.

Mr. Hayes listened attentively to the charge preferred by Sergeant Overton. Hinkey, too, who was behind a barred door in one of the cells, listened with darkening brow.

"It's all rot!" raged the arrested soldier. "It's all a personal matter, and Overton has vented his spite on me."

"Silence, my man!" ordered Lieutenant Hayes sternly. "And when you refer to Sergeant Overton, call him by his title.

"I won't shut up until I've had my say!" raged Private Hinkey, gripping with both hands the bars of the cell door. "Lieutenant——"

"Silence, or you'll have disrespectful language to the officer of the day added to the other charges against you," warned Lieutenant Hayes, stepping over to the cell door. "Not another word out of you, Hinkey."

In the old days the prisoner would have been locked up until the next general court-martial convened. But in these newer days the plan is to have as many offenses as possible tried before summary court.

A summary court consists of one officer, who must, when practicable, be of field officer's rank.

So, at nine the next morning, Private Hinkey was arraigned before Major Silsbee. All the necessary witnesses were there, too.

Hinkey, of course, claimed that it had all been an affair of personal spite on the part of Sergeant Overton.

This claim Hinkey was given a fair opportunity to prove, but he failed to do so.

"I commend Sergeant Overton for his soldierly attitude in the matter," declared Major Silsbee when summing up. "Sergeant Overton behaved with an amount of decision and of moderation that is remarkable in so young a non-

commissioned officer. Sergeant Overton thereby demonstrated his fitness to command men. Private Hinkey's conduct, from start to finish, as testified to by the witnesses, was gross and indefensible. Such conduct in a soldier of the regular Army is nothing short of disgraceful."

Then followed the sentence.

For disrespectful allusions to Lieutenant Ferrers, uttered in the presence of other enlisted men, Private Hinkey was sentenced to forfeit fifteen dollars of his pay. For disrespect and insubordination, as evinced toward Sergeant Overton, and for resisting arrest, he was fined twenty-five dollars more of his pay.

Thus Private Hinkey would be obliged to work for the United States for nothing during nearly the next three months of his service.

Further, he was sentenced to one week's confinement at the guard house, and to perform fatigue labor on the post.

Then, still under guard, Hinkey was marched back to the guard house.

His sentence, which, of course, the fellow regarded as tyranny pure and simple, filled his heart with black hatred against the boyish sergeant. At first sight it may seem strange, but the outcome of the whole affair was to raise Hal Overton considerably in the esteem of his comrades at Fort Clowdry.

As his service in the Army lengthens the soldier acquires a trained sense of justice.

A non-commissioned officer is never allowed to lay hands in anger on any man beneath him in rank, save to restrain a drunken or crazy man, or in defense of himself or of another non-com. or officer.

But Hinkey had struck at Hal, and the latter, had he been so inclined, would have been justified in leaping upon the private and beating him into submission. Instead, he had ordered disinterested soldiers to bring about the submission and the arrest.

More, Major Silsbee's comments on the case had been repeated by the witnesses to other comrades in barracks.

A soldier soon comes to realize, if he is a reasonable man, that his officers always endeavor to work out impartial justice. Therefore, Major Silsbee's comments had greatly strenghtened Hal's reputation among his soldier comrades.

This does not mean that all suspicion against Sergeant Overton was forgotten, but the men now remembered that Hinkey had been the most active and bitter poisoner of minds against Hal. So, now, reaction had its natural effect—somewhat in Hal Overton's favor.

The fourth day of Hinkey's imprisonment

Sergeant Hal had charge of the guard that controlled the seven prisoners, in all, who were now working out guard house terms.

Hinkey now managed to come close to the young sergeant in command of the fatigue party.

"You may think you've won out," growled Private Hinkey.

"My man," spoke Hal almost kindly, "I've no desire to see you get into more trouble. Attend to your fatigue duty!"

"You may think you've won out," repeated Hinkey. "But wait!"

CHAPTER XI

WHEN HINKEY WON GOOD OPINIONS

GREAT news came to Fort Clowdry these days.

All summer the War Department had been considering the advisability of holding a military tournament at Denver. An enormous religious organization of young people of both sexes was to hold its convention in that city.

In the same week two great secret societies were also to hold annual meetings in Denver.

Thus there would be an unusually large crowd in this handsome, hustling city of the Rockies.

The War Department, in its efforts to conduct the Army like any other great business enterprise, occasionally "advertises" in the way of holding a military tournament.

These tournaments, at which seats are provided for many thousands of spectators, show in graphic splendor the work of all the different branches of the military service.

It is the experience of the War Department that each tournament, if held under conditions that will draw a huge crowd of spectators, always results in a rush of the most desirable recruits for the Army.

Soldiers always take a keen interest in these tournaments. It means to them the excitement of travel and change, and the prospect of winning applause that is so dear to the average human heart.

It also means, for men of known good conduct, a welcome amount of leave to wander about the big city on the outskirts of which the tournament is held. There are many other reasons why men of the Regular Army always welcome these affairs.

All four of the companies at Fort Clowdry were to go to Denver, save for a detail of ten men from each company, who were to be left behind to guard government property at the fort.

"Hinkey," announced Captain Cortland, meeting that sullen soldier, "I don't suppose you have figured on being allowed to go to Denver with your company."

"I suppose, sir, that I'm slated for the post guard," replied Hinkey, saluting.

"My man, you've recently been guilty of conduct grossly unbecoming a soldier. But you've served your guard house period, and you'll be busy, for many weeks yet to come, in working out the fines imposed against you. For breaches of discipline it is the intent of the authorities to provide sufficient punishment. It is not,

however, the purpose to keep on punishing a man. You may be glad, therefore, to know that you are to be allowed to go to Denver with your company."

"Thank you, sir; I am glad," replied Private Hinkey, saluting very respectfully.

"Then look carefully to your conduct until the time comes to start," admonished Captain Cortland.

"Thank you, sir. I most certainly shall."

Then, as he watched the back of Captain Cortland, a peculiarly disagreeable smile came to Hinkey's lips.

"Oh, yes, I'll be careful!" he muttered. "And I am glad of the chance—far more glad than you can guess, Cap. A trip like this will give me ten times the chance I'd have here at Clowdry to get even with that cheeky young kid sergeant, Overton!"

Thereafter Hinkey fairly dreamed of the military journey that was so near at hand.

All was bustle and activity on the military reservation. Soldiers taking part in a military tournament require almost as many "properties" and "stage settings" as are needed by a big theatrical company.

For the tournament is, actually and purposely, a big theatrical display. It is intended to show all the excitement, snap and glamour of the sol-

dier's life and his deeds of high skill and great daring.

Then came the day when the battalion, with drum-major and band at its head, marched away with colors bravely flying, and boarded the train at the little, nearby station.

The train left soon after nine in the morning.

Private Hinkey was greatly disappointed at this. He had hoped that the command might travel by night. He had dreamed of catching Sergeant Hal on a platform, and of hurling him from the moving car without his crime being seen of other eyes.

"But no matter!" muttered the brute to himself. "I know the programme at the tournament, and there'll be a lot of chances—more than I can use, as I need but one!" the sullen fellow finished grimly under his breath.

It was late in the afternoon when the train was shunted upon a siding not far from the great ball grounds on which the tourney was to be held. There was no crowd here as yet, and no crashing of brass or flourish of trumpets. The battalion, at route step, moved into the grounds. Here ranks were broken and arms stacked. Then, by detachments, each under an officer, or non-commissioned officer, the men were hustled off to attend to an enormous amount of swift, skilful labor.

At one far-end of the grounds the full-sized Army tents were erected, with cook tents, mess and hospital tents, and all, for the men were to live comfortably in the brief time that they were to be here.

Engineer and cavalry troops were already on the field, the engineers having arrived first of all, in order to lay the grounds out for the work in hand. Artillery and Signal Corps men, and a small detachment of ordnance troops, were due to arrive before dark.

By supper time the hard-worked soldiers had some right to feel tired. It was not until nine in the evening that the men were through for that day. Then a few of the men of best conduct were given passes to leave camp and visit Denver until midnight.

Private Hinkey was not one of these men. He did not even want to go, for he had worked like a beaver, and was thoroughly tired out. It had seemed, since reaching the grounds, as though Hinkey had been determined to show how good and industrious a soldier he could be.

"That man is working to reinstate himself in the good conduct grade," remarked Lieutenant Hampton, calling Hinkey's tireless industry to Captain Cortland's attention.

"Then he'll have all the chance he wants," replied the captain. "We don't want to keep

any man down, or to give him a dog's name—with apologies to the dog."

As Hinkey had been in a service detachment under Overton's command Hal felt it but just to say to the fellow:

"Hinkey, you've worked harder and more attentively than any man in this detachment."

"Thank you, Sergeant; I've tried to," replied the fellow, with such well-pretended respect that Sergeant Hal almost fell over.

"I almost think I've misjudged the man in thinking him one of our worst," Overton told himself.

It had been well for the boyish young sergeant had he been but a trifle more suspicious of such sudden reform on his enemy's part!

At five in the morning, or almost an hour earlier than usual, every officer and man in this temporary camp was routed out from under his blankets by the sharp, stirring notes of first call to reveille.

Breakfast was hurriedly disposed of, and the simple duties of ordinary "camp police" performed by the time that it was fully light.

And now more labor, for the stage settings must be arranged, that they might all be moved swiftly into place as the need came.

It was noon when the men finished. Then mess call, or "come and get it," as the soldiers

facetiously term it, was sounded over the camp, and officer and man alike hastened to the well-earned midday meal.

"We ought to have a huge crowd," spoke Corporal Noll Terry, at camp table.

"We ought to, but we won't," predicted Sergeant Hupner.

"Why not, Sergeant?"

"You didn't take a pass to go to town, last night?"

"No."

"I did."

"Well, Sergeant?"

"The town is billed from one end to another with posters of the show," continued Hupner.

"Meaning our tournament?"

"No, Terry. Of course, our show is billed, too, but the show I'm alluding to is Howe and Spangleton's Great Combined Circuses."

"Are they showing in Denver to-day?" asked Sergeant Overton.

"Yes, siree," replied Hupner, with emphasis. "And you know what these western towns are when a truly big circus works this far west. The circus will be selling standing-room at double prices, and this show of ours will be performed to two or three hundred small kids whose hearts are broken because they didn't have the price of a circus ticket."

"We ought to have had some other date in the week, then," spoke up another man at table.

"Oh," grimaced Hupner, "the War Department thinks a whole lot of its regulars, of course, so I don't suppose any one over at Washington could picture the troops being called upon to show their best work to empty benches that would hold twenty thousand spectators."

That same news, and that same impression had reached the artillery, the cavalry, the ordnance detachment, the engineers and the men of the Signal Corps. The officers, likewise, shook their heads. All were greatly disappointed to think that the Army had to compete with the sawdust, the tinsel, the gay music and the dash and whoop-la of the circus.

Yet one man in this Regular Army encampment felt wholly satisfied with himself.

That man was Private Hinkey.

He knew the programme of the tournament, and the secret of this sullen wretch's great industry was known at least to himself.

"I've got it all fixed to rid the regiment of that kid sergeant," the brute in uniform exulted to himself. "Exit Kid Overton from the Thirty-fourth!"

CHAPTER XII

HAL RIDES INTO TREACHERY

AT one-thirty the gates of the ball grounds were thrown open.

A long programme lay before the assembled regulars, so the tournament was to begin at two o'clock.

The same performance was to be repeated in the evening, under brilliant electric lighting.

As they left the camp tables, however, the men moved about rather dejectedly.

The unexpected competition with the big circus had spoiled their hopes of winning round after round of delighted applause from huge crowds.

Yet barely were the gates to the grounds open when the soldiers began to take notice.

In an instant after opening there was a big rush at the gates. Men and women, boys and girls, crowded and jostled to get into the grounds.

"They'll stop coming in two minutes, at this rate," grumbled Sergeant Hupner.

Yet he proved a poor prophet. By quarter of two nearly everyone of the more than twenty thousand seats for spectators had been filled.

Five minutes after that not a seat could be had, even by squeezing. Just before two o'clock ten thousand more spectators had crowded in, standing wherever they could find the space.

Outside the crowd still pressed. Thousands simply had to be turned away.

Every officer present now wore a quiet smile that hid his delight under an orderly appearance.

"I wonder if the circus has a crowd like this?" gasped Sergeant Hupner, his astonished gaze roving over the densely packed masses of humanity.

An artillery band was playing at its loudest and gayest.

"I wonder," repeated Sergeant Hupner, "if the circus is playing to a crush like this."

No; it wasn't. Over under the Howe and Spangleton big-top, with its plain and reserved seats for eighteen thousand people, consternation prevailed.

The Army had proved the winning attraction for Denver's amusement-seeking crowds!

Only some eleven hundred and fifty people had paid to see the afternoon performance at the circus. In chagrin, the management hurriedly passed in free some two hundred more loungers on the lot.

"I never even dreamed of a streak of luck

like this!" grumbled Proprietor Howe to his partner, Spangleton.

"I hope we'll never meet it again. What has struck us this blow under the belt?"

"The confounded regular Army," growled Howe. "I've just telephoned over, and I hear that folks are packed in so tightly at the Army show that the people are able to breathe only half the usual number of times to the minute."

"Then they'll hit us just as bad to-night," growled Spangleton. "Howe, with the Army to play against, we'd save money by pulling down our tents now and striking the rails for the next stand."

Just a minute or so before two o'clock the artillery band left the bandstand and marched back to camp.

Now, all in an instant, the military parade formed.

At the head was the cavalry band, followed by a squadron (two troops or companies) of splendidly mounted fighting men, their accoutrements jingling.

As the cavalry, its band blaring joyously, passed out before the people, the Signal Corps men followed on foot. Now the artillery, preceded by a mounted band that was just now silent, swung into line. Right behind the artillery, with its men perched up on the seats, their

arms folded, or else driving the horses from saddles, came more men on foot, the ordnance detachment.

Now a third band, the Thirty-fourth's, marched on to the scene, silent, like the artillery musicians. After the third band in the line came the first battalion of the Thirty-fourth—at its head Colonel North and Major Silsbee, with their respective staffs, all on horseback. And now behind them marched, with the precise, easy rhythm of the foot soldier, the four companies, A, B, C and D, all moving like so many fine, automatic, easy-jointed machines.

The mounted detachments had brought forth rounds of rousing applause as they swept by, but when the infantrymen—the real, solid, fighting wall of the Army came in view, its men moving with the perfectly gaited, steady whump, whump! of superbly marching men, the spectators began to yell in frantic earnest.

The cavalry band ceased its stirring strain. Instantly the mounted drum major of the artillery swung about on his horse, holding up his baton, then bringing it down with the signal, "play."

As the artillery band blazed forth in a glory of rousing melody the noise of people's feet increased.

By the time that the infantry marched past

the central portion of the great mass of civilians it was the turn of the Thirty-fourth's band. Every spectator, nearly, was now standing, stamping, waving. Cheer after cheer went up.

It seemed as though human enthusiasm could not know greater bounds. Faint echoes must have reached the distant, nearly empty circus big-top. Yet the breathless thousands had caught, as yet, but the first tame pageantry of this glimpse of the glory of armed men.

Just before B company, as it swung along at the good old regular gait, one excited onlooker hurled a well-filled wallet—the only sign left him for showing his utter enthusiasm.

File after file of foot soldiers stepped over this wallet, yet, if one of the infantrymen knew it was there, not one of them let any sign escape him. Discipline was absolutely perfect. These marching men of rifle and bayonet swept on, heads up, eyes straight forward, every file in flawless, absolute alignment.

And so the wallet was passed over and left behind while the crowd, staring at this unexpected scene of soldierly discipline, went wilder than before, in a frantic acclaim that was granted from the soul.

A policeman, standing at the edge of the crowd, picked up the wallet, returning it to its somewhat disappointed owner.

When the parade had swept around the field, each band playing in its turn, the crowd settled back with a sigh, as though satisfied that the greatest sight on the programme had been witnessed.

Yet hardly was there a pause. A troop of cavalry came forward, now, at the trot. All the evolutions of the school of the troop, mounted, were now gone through with. All the swift, bewildering changes of the cavalryman's manual of arms were exhibited.

Single riders and squads exhibited some of the prettiest work of the cowboy, for the American cavalryman has learned his riding and his daring from the best work of generations of cowboys.

Men rode two, and then three horses, at once, standing on bareback and leaping their animals over gates, ditches and hedges.

Down at the far end of the wheel a squad of cavalrymen halted, dismounted, unlimbered their carbines, and began firing at a squad of cavalrymen who galloped toward them from the other extremity of the field. Three of the men fired upon toppled and fell from their saddles to the dust with wonderful realism, while startled "ohs!" came from the eager onlookers.

Just behind this detachment rode more cavalrymen at the gallop. Three of these men, with-

out seeming effort, swung down from their saddles, while their mounts still galloped, picked up the "dead or wounded," and then these horses, guided by their riders, wheeled and made fast time with the mock "casualties" to the rear.

It was a wonderful sight. Now, the audience began to come somewhere near its actual limits of enthusiasm.

Other yet more wonderful feats of skill and precision by the cavalry followed. Ere the "yellow-legs" had retired, momentarily, from the field of display, every small boy in the crowd —and many a large one—had decided that the life of the trooper must be his.

Then the flying artillery came on to the field, amid clouds of dust, the urgings of drivers, the sharp commands of officers and the pealing commands of bugles. For the first time in their lives the spectators realized how like lightning the American artillery moves, and how speedily it gets into deadly action. It was a pity that none of the fine marksmanship with the field cannon could be shown. The audience had to be satisfied with salvo after salvo fired with blank cartridges at imaginary enemies.

Then next the scene swiftly changed to a well-simulated one of battle, in which all arms engaged. "Under heavy fire" the engineers

threw a bridge swiftly across a wide ditch representing a stream. While this was going on Signal Corps men laid wires and had telephone and telegraph instruments in operation from the firing line to the rear.

More of it came when the squadron of cavalry, at one end of the field, and backed by the signal and ordnance detachments, now bearing rifles, impersonated a hostile advance, firing volleys and "at will" at the artillery and infantry, posted to repulse them.

It took the breath of the spectators away. For now they gazed upon the grim realities of war, save for the actual deaths and manglings which all knew must follow such fierce firing when done in reality.

It was some minutes afterward before the smoke cleared away from over the field sufficiently to allow all to see the next spectacles. But all onlookers now felt the need of a brief rest from such sensations.

There were a host of features to the rousing programme, and not a spectator but thrilled and throbbed, and thanked his lucky stars that he was here, at the show, the spectacle of a lifetime!

Feature after feature followed, in a swiftly-moving, tightly-packed programme lasting three hours. The riot drill, showing with vivid ef-

fect how a battalion of regular infantry can move through a densely packed mob, brought forth tumultuous cheers. When the cheering had subsided such shouts as these were offered by excited spectators:

"Bring your anarchists here to-night, and show them this!"

"Never get into a riot unless you go with the regulars!"

It was truly an Army afternoon. All such afternoons are, for the average American knows truly nothing about his own Army. When he sees it actually at work he becomes, for the time at least, an "Army crank."

There were many features in which only one, or a few men, figured importantly. One of these was now about to be offered. On the programme it bore the title, "the bicycle dispatch rider."

No name was set opposite this title, but the man who had been selected for the work was Sergeant Hal Overton.

At the far side of the field the scene had been arranged. It represented a hill road, over which the dispatch bearer must ride at breakneck speed. For picturesque purposes Hal wore a surgeon's field case, hanging over one shoulder by a strap. In actual war time his real dispatches would have been hidden somewhere in

his clothing, his shoes, or what-not place of concealment.

Of a sudden the Thirty-fourth's band turned loose into a dashing gallop played at faster time than usual. It was the signal for Sergeant Hal to mount his wheel and ride as for life.

Something in the speed, the dash, the evident purpose of the young soldier caught the hearts of the spectators as soon as Hal started. He had not gone fifty yards on his way before the cheering once more burst forth.

At the outset were some little gaps in the path, representing brooks and rills. Over these Sergeant Hal sped as if they did not exist, while little upward spurts of water helped out the illusion.

Ahead of the young military bicyclist now appeared a plain fence, some four feet high. Hal Overton rode at this with all the speed his flying feet could impart to the pedals. He appeared bent on violent collision with the fence.

Indeed, he rode at the palings as though he could not stop. Yet, when almost in the act of collision, Sergeant Hal made a flying leap from his wheel, which he tossed over the fence. In two incredibly swift movements he was over the fence. His wheel hardly seemed to have fallen at all, so swiftly did the young sergeant have it going again. He made a flying leap to the sad-

dle, and was again pedaling desperately, while five or six shots to the rear filled out the illusion of a dispatch bearer being pursued by enemies.

That trick at the fence instantly took hold of the younger male portion of the audience. Denver boys saw wherein young soldiers were taught things about bicycle riding that were not known among civilians.

Hardly was Sergeant Hal going at full speed again when another obstacle loomed up in his way. This was an intrenchment front, sloping as he approached it, but with a sheer drop of some three feet on the other side.

Straight up the slope dashed Hal Overton. For a fraction of a second, as he left the top of the barrier, his wheel looked more like an odd airship, but now the forward wheel struck the ground beyond once more, the rear wheel swiftly following, and the dispatch rider was going onward faster than ever.

The small boys now led in the noise that came from the spectators' seats.

Just ahead lay the greatest peril of the path for the military dispatch rider. Here, in the hill scene, had been cut an actual gully, some eighteen feet deep, and fully twelve feet across.

Just a few minutes before a squad of soldiers had placed across this gully the trunk of a tree, shorn of its limbs and trimmed down close.

As Sergeant Hal now approached this tree trunk, which was not, at its thickest part, more than a foot in diameter, his purpose dawned upon the watching thousands.

This tree trunk represented the only possible way of getting over the gully.

Surely, the young rider would slow down, dismount, take the wheel on his shoulders and cross the slim bridge on foot.

But the crackling out of more shots behind him told the onlookers that the young dispatch rider in Uncle Sam's khaki uniform must make great haste.

Hal lay on harder than ever on his pedals. His speed carried to the onlookers the reality of a desperate race of life and death.

Close to the nearer edge of the gully stood a solitary figure, that of Corporal Noll Terry, who had had charge of the men laying the tree trunk across the gully.

Noll still stood by, watching, ready to be at hand if anything happened. One other man watched, though from a considerable distance.

This man was Private Hinkey, who alone knew the secret of his willing industry since reaching this camp.

Hinkey, unseen by others, had managed treacherously to "fix" the log in a manner that had defied detection.

Sergeant Hal's Forward Wheel Struck the Log.

"There'll be an end to the sergeant kid, in two seconds more!" gloated the rascal.

Sergeant's Hal's forward wheel struck the log, throwing full weight upon it. There was a snapping crackle, then a shriek from thousands.

For the log had snapped in two, and Sergeant Hal Overton, thrown head downward. was on his way to a broken neck at the bottom of the gully.

CHAPTER XIII

CHASING A SPEEDING DESERTER

INSTEAD of one, there were two flying bodies headed toward the gully's bottom.

Corporal Noll Terry, standing there, had heard the ominous crackle of snapping wood.

If there is one thing that a soldier is taught above another, it is to think and move swiftly at a critical moment.

Noll saw the tree trunk sag downward, in just the fraction of a second ere it broke.

Nor did Corporal Terry wait to see more.

With his eyes on his bunkie, Terry made a prompt leap downward.

He had the advantage of landing on his feet. He was jarred, but there was no time to stop to think of that.

At a bound he was far enough forward, his arms outstretched, to swing hold of head-downward Hal Overton.

The impact might have been too much. Sergeant Hal might even yet have landed on his head. But, as he threw him arms around Hal, Corporal Terry threw himself over backward.

He fell with a thump, but was shaken up—no bones broken.

Sergeant Hal landed on top of his bunkie unhurt.

In an instant they separated, each leaping to his feet.

The falling halves of the tree trunk had fallen perilously close to the boyish non-coms., yet by a stroke of good fortune neither of the comrades had been struck.

"Thank you, old bunkie! The best ever!" glowed Hal, as without a backward look he raced to pick up his wheel. "Hurt?"

"Not a bit," gasped Noll, his wind jarred out of him for the moment.

"Then I'll finish the ride!"

To the thrilled, throbbing spectators there did not come a thought of "accident."

Clearly this whole splendid scene had been only a glimpse of practical military training.

It had all been planned, of course, so the audience supposed, that the tree trunk should snap and that the other young sergeant should be there to perform the swift work of rescue.

Even at that it was a wonderful sight, and again the spectators were on their feet, cheering more hoarsely than ever.

Yet hardly had they started to cheer when, some how, in a way they did not quite grasp, Sergeant Hal Overton had climbed up out of the gully, carrying his wheel with him.

Now he was mounted again! On the further side of the gully the young Army dispatch rider was racing forward again.

His wheel, somewhat damaged by the fall, was moving stiffly now, but Overton put into his pedaling every ounce of energy left to him.

In another moment he was out of sight, his dispatch-bearing ride ended, and the band leader stopped his musicians.

In this startling scene the onlookers felt that they had viewed the best piece of individual daring of the afternoon.

Little did they guess that they had seen the failure of a scoundrel's dastardly attempt to end Sergeant Overton's life.

But grizzled old Colonel North, of the Thirty-fourth United States Infantry, knew better.

"Cortland," he remarked, turning to B Company's captain, "just as soon as the last number is over I want you to make an instant and red-hot investigation of that accident to Sergeant Overton. Report to me as soon as you have even the trace of a suggestion to make."

"Yes, sir; and I have one suggestion to make now," replied Captain Cortland.

"What is it?"

"I ask you, sir, to oblige me very greatly by promising a warrant at once for Corporal Terry's promotion to sergeant."

"By Jove, young Terry earned it!" agreed Colonel North.

"Yes, sir; and, to my way of thinking, he did more. He proved that B Company cannot afford to be without a sergeant of his proved calibre."

"Go to Wright, the battalion adjutant, then, and tell him, with my compliments, to prepare an order at once, for reading at the dress parade which is to end up the afternoon's show."

"Very good, sir."

"And, Cortland, ask Wright, as a personal favor to me, to read the order slowly and distinctly, so that the audience can grasp the fact that they've witnessed a deed of heroism and its prompt reward in the Army."

"A splendid idea, sir!"

At the close of the afternoon's fast and furious work came a spectacle such as doubtless no one in the audience had ever seen before.

The three fighting arms of the service—artillery, cavalry and infantry—combined at dress parade.

The ceremony, as enacted that afternoon, possessed all the fervor and solemnity of a religious rite.

When it came to the publication of orders appointing Corporal Oliver Terry a sergeant in recognition of unusual bravery and judgment

in saving a comrade's life, only a small percentage of the on-looking, listening thousands grasped the importance or meaning of the promotion of one young soldier.

No matter! All would read about it in the Denver papers the next morning.

At the firing of retreat gun three military bands combined in the playing of "The Star Spangled Banner."

Then, as the troops marched off, all was over as far as the audience was concerned.

Captain Cortland, however, had no sooner dismissed his company than he turned back to the field, to go to the gully to investigate the matter of the broken log. Lieutenant Prescott went with him.

Over back of one of the cook tents, however, a plain soldier man was already arriving at the truth.

"Hinkey, come over here!" called Private Slosson.

There was something in this soldier's voice which made Private Hinkey feel that perhaps it would not be altogether wise to disregard this request that sounded so much to him like an order.

"Hinkey," continued Private Slosson, " 'twas a near escape from breaking his neck that Sergeant Overton had this afternoon."

"That's no concern of mine, I guess," murmured Hinkey.

"Then it ought to be," retorted Private Slosson with considerable warmth. "Hinkey, you had me guessing yesterday and this forenoon, you were so full of industry. And that put me in mind. I saw you coming down from near the gully this morning, and you had something hidden under your coat."

The fingers that held Hinkey's cigarette began to tremble.

"What do you mean, Slosson?"

"Well, first of all, the thing you had under your coat was a saw. I saw you hide something under the woodpile here, but I'm so dumb that I didn't think much of it at the time. Now, the log over the gully was a spruce log, wasn't it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I do," replied Slosson, "and we haven't been using much spruce timber around here, either. So I looked over the saw. Hinkey, between the teeth is quite a little bit of what looks mighty like spruce sawdust. Queer, ain't it?"

"I don't know," replied Private Hinkey, speaking bravely, though his face now looked bloodless and his lips were quivering.

"Spruce sawdust in the saw you handled," continued Slosson mercilessly. "And say, the

saw cut in the log over at the gully was pasted with putty, and then bark bits stuck on, to hide the cut. Wasn't that the way it was done?"

"How should I know?" snarled Private Hinkey, trying to glare back into the accusing eyes of Private Slosson.

"Why I asked," continued the latter soldier, "was because I've just been taking a look at the service clothes you wore this morning, and I find putty marks in several places on the trousers."

Hinkey realized that he had been unmasked. Moreover, only one look into Slosson's eyes was needed for making sure that the accusing soldier was not going to keep still about it.

With a sudden snarl of rage, Hinkey sprang forward, driving his hard right fist squarely into Slosson's left eye and knocking that soldier down.

Then, without loss of a second, Hinkey made a dive for the nearest gate of the grounds. As he ran at top speed Private Hinkey then and there, so far as he was personally concerned, ended his connection with the regular Army of the United States.

Private Slosson, holding his eye and feeling weak and dizzy, shouted:

"Some one run after Hinkey, B Company, and catch him!"

The call brought several men, among them Lieutenant Hampton, of B Company.

"What has Hinkey done?" demanded the lieutenant, running up.

"He knocked me down, and then deserted, sir."

"Why, my man?"

"Because he fixed the tree trunk in the way that nearly cost Sergeant Overton his life, and I just showed Hinkey that I had all the proof. You'll not see the fellow again, sir, unless you're swift."

Lieutenant Hampton bounded to the gateway. Down the street he saw Private Hinkey, running like a deer and already near a street corner.

Hal Overton was the only sergeant close enough for the lieutenant's purpose.

"Sergeant Overton, take four men, pursue Hinkey and bring him back here," ordered Lieutenant Hampton.

Hal reached the gateway just in time to see Hinkey running around the street corner.

In a twinkling Hal and four soldiers were hotfoot after the suspected deserter.

But Hinkey was out of sight now. As he reached the middle of the block into which he had turned, a man in his shirt sleeves, standing idly in a doorway called out softly:

"Jump in behind me, comrade, if you're in trouble and being chased."

Hinkey stopped pantingly, giving the man a swift look. That glance was enough to show the deserting soldier that he had met a kindred spirit.

"Thanks. I'll accept," muttered Hinkey, darting into the doorway.

The man who had hailed him pulled the door shut just before Sergeant Hal and four soldiers ran around the corner above.

"What's that soldier been doing that ran by here so fast?" called the citizen in shirt sleeves.

"Which way did he go?" asked Hal swiftly, halting just an instant.

"See the next corner?"

"Yes."

"Your man turned there—to the left. You fellows will have to double your speed if you're ever going to catch that soldier."

"Put on all the steam you can, men," Hal called back over his shoulder as he once more started in what he believed to be pursuit.

Chuckling softly, the citizen opened the door, closed it again and went inside to tell Hinkey why he had saved him.

It was a full hour before Sergeant Hal Overton again reported back at camp on the grounds.

He had come back at last, forced to admit himself baffled.

"You did all you could, Sergeant," replied Captain Cortland, who had just returned to the company street. "Hinkey will be caught, sooner or later."

Then, turning to First Sergeant Gray, who had just come up, Captain Cortland smiled as he added:

"Sergeant Gray, I wonder if Hinkey is still running. If he runs long enough he'll probably fall in with some muck-raking magazine writer, who'll get out of Hinkey a startling story of why some soldiers insist on deserting the Army."

"Captain," replied Sergeant Gray, "I could tell those magazine writers a good deal about why men desert from the Army, sir. But the magazine writers wouldn't want my story of why men desert."

"What would your story be, Sergeant?"

"Why, sir, I'd tell those writers—and prove it by the records—that the men who desert from the Army are the same worthless, skulking vagabonds who are always getting bounced out of jobs in civil life because they're no good anywhere."

"That's the whole story, Sergeant Gray," nodded Captain Cortland.

"I know it, sir; I haven't been in the Army all these years not to have found out that much."

Just then Noll Terry appeared on the scene, wearing his newly won sergeant's chevrons.

Captain Cortland's inquiry into the cause of the accident to Sergeant Overton was concluded by taking the sworn testimony of Private Slosson. The papers were then filed away to be used in case the deserter Hinkey should be apprehended.

CHAPTER XIV

ALGY COMES TO A CONCLUSION

HINKEY, secure in his new retreat, with a new-found "friend" who wanted the services of a man of Hinkey's stripe, was not found.

The evening programme of the military tournament was carried out before all the spectators who could wedge themselves into the grounds, and once more the big circus played to a small crowd.

In the morning the Thirty-fourth entrained and returned to Fort Clowdry.

While in Denver, Lieutenant Ferrers, though he had accompanied the battalion, had been employed in duties that kept him out of the public eye.

Once back at the post, however, Ferrers was warned by both battalion and regimental commanders that he must buckle down at once to learn his duties as an officer.

"I had an idea that being an officer was a good deal more of a gentleman's job," Algy sighed to Lieutenant Prescott.

"An officer's position in the Army is a hard-working job," Prescott rejoined. "However,

there's nothing in that fact to make it difficult for an officer to be a gentleman, too. In fact, he must be an all-around gentleman, or get out of the service."

"But gentlemen shouldn't be expected to work —at least, not hard," argued Algy Ferrers.

"Now, where on earth did you get that idea?" laughed Lieutenant Prescott.

"All the fellows I used to know were gentlemen," protested Algy, "and none of them ever worked."

"Then what were they good for?" demanded Lieutenant Prescott crisply.

"Eh?" breathed Ferrers, looking puzzled.

"If they didn't work, if they didn't do anything real in the world, what were they good for? What was their excuse for wanting to live?" insisted Prescott.

"Prexy, old chap, I'm afraid you're an anarchist," gasped Algy, looking almost humanly distressed.

"No; you're the anarchist," laughed the other lieutenant, "for no anarchist ever wants to work. Come, now, Ferrers, buck up! Go over the drill manual with me."

For two days Algy did seem inclined to buckle down to the hard work of learning how to command other men efficiently. Then one night he fell.

That is to say, he went off the reservation without notifying any of his superior officers.

At the sounding of drill assembly the next morning, every officer on post was present with the one exception of young Mr. Ferrers.

"Where's that hopeless idiot now?" muttered Colonel North peevishly, for he had come down to see the battalion drill.

"I haven't the least idea, sir," replied Major Silsbee.

"Send an orderly up to his quarters, Major."

"Very good, sir."

But, as both major and colonel had suspected, Ferrers wasn't in his quarters. Nor was he anywhere else on post apparently.

It was five o'clock that afternoon when Lieutenant Ferrers, in civilian dress, passed the guard house in returning on post.

"Wanted—at the adjutant's office—am I?" queried Algy. "Oh, yes; I imagine I am. Queer place, this Army."

With a sigh of resignation, but appearing not in the least alarmed, Ferrers went to the office of the regimental adjutant.

"You've been away again without leave, and skipped battalion drill and several other duties," said the adjutant dryly.

"Yes," admitted Ferrers promptly. "But I've got a good excuse."

"You'll find Colonel North in the next room ready to hear what your excuse can be."

"I suppose he'll scold me again," murmured Algy resignedly.

"Yes; all of that," admitted the adjutant dryly. "Better go in at once, and take your medicine, for the colonel is about ready to leave and go over to his house."

As Algy entered Colonel North's office the older man lifted his head and looked rather coldly at Mr. Ferrers.

Algy brought up his hand in a tardy salute, then stood there.

But the colonel only continued to look at him. Ferrers fidgeted until he could endure the silence no longer.

"You—you wanted to speak to me, sir?" stammered Algy, the frigid atmosphere disconcerting him.

"I never wanted to speak to a man less in my life," rejoined Colonel North icily.

"Thank you, sir. Then I'll be going."

"Stop, sir!"

"Eh, sir?"

"Mr. Ferrers, I'll listen to whatever you have to say."

"It's all about my being away to-day, I suppose, sir," Algy went on lamely. What he had considered a most excellent excuse on his part

now suddenly struck him as being exceedingly lame.

Again Colonel North's lips were tightly compressed. He merely looked at this young officer, but Algy found that look to be the same thing as acute torment.

"Y-yes, sir; I was away to-day sir."

"Further than Clowdry, Mr. Ferrers?"

"Oh, dear, yes, sir," admitted Algy promptly. "Took the train, in fact, sir, and ran up to Ridgecrest. The Benson-Bodges have a new mountain estate of their own up there. Just heard about it the other day, sir. Wrote Benson-Bodge himself, and got a letter yesterday evening. Old Bense invited me to come up and visit himself and family, and not to stand on ceremony. So I didn't."

"No; you didn't stand on any ceremony, Mr. Ferrers," was the colonel's sarcastic response. "Not even the ceremony of formality of obtaining leave."

"But it was all right this time, sir. Quite all right, sir," went on Algy Ferrers with more confidence. "I rather think you know who the Benson-Bodges are, sir? Most important people. A man in the Army can't afford to ignore them, sir—so I didn't."

"I don't know anything about the people you name, Mr. Ferrers, and I don't want to."

"Pardon me, sir, won't you?" demanded Algy beamingly, "but for once I am quite certain you are wrong, sir. Really an Army man can't afford not to know the Benson-Bodges. Old Bense is a cousin of the President. Old Bense has tremendous influence at Washington."

"Then I wonder, Mr. Ferrers, if your friend has influence enough at Washington to save your shoulder-straps for you?"

"Eh, sir? What's that? What do you mean, sir?" asked Algy, again looking puzzled and uneasy.

"I am going to make my meaning very clear, Mr. Ferrers. To-day's conduct is merely the winding up affair of many discreditable pieces of conduct in your part. You have proved, conclusively, that you are not fit to be an officer in the Army."

"Not fit to——" repeated Algy slowly. Then broke into a laugh as he added: "That's a good joke, sir."

"Is it?" inquired Colonel North, raising his eyebrows. "Then I trust that you will enjoy every chapter in the joke, Mr. Ferrers. I am going to order you to your quarters, in arrest. And, as I'm afraid you don't really know what arrest means, I'm going to place a sentry before your door to see that you don't go out."

"For how long, sir?"

"For as long as may be necessary, Mr. Ferrers. Having placed you in arrest I shall report your case through the usual military channels and recommend that you be tried by a general court-martial. I am of the opinion, Mr. Ferrers, that the court-martial will find you guilty and recommend that you be dishonorably dismissed from the service."

"Dishonorably dis——" gasped Algy, feeling so weak that he suddenly dropped down into a chair, unbidden. "Gracious! But that will strike the guv'nor hard! See here, sir," the impossible young officer went on, more spiritedly, as he realized the impending disgrace, "if you're going to do anything as beastly and rough as that, sir—pardon, sir—then I won't stand for it!"

"What will you do, then?" demanded North.

"Sooner than stand for being tried, like an ordinary pickpocket, Colonel, I'll resign!"

"It is not usual, Mr. Ferrers, to allow an officer to resign when he's facing serious charges."

"But I'll resign just the same, sir. Pardon me, sir, but I don't care what you say, now. Things have come to a pass where I've simply got to strike back for myself, sooner than see my family troubled by the idea of my being tried."

"But if your resignation is not accepted, Mr. Ferrers?"

"It will have to be, won't it, if I say that I simply won't bother to stay in the beastly old Army any longer?"

"No; a resignation doesn't have to be accepted, and the fact that you are under charges will operate to prevent the consideration of your resignation until after your trial."

Algy Ferrers looked mightily disturbed over that information.

"Are you serious about wanting to resign and getting out of the Army, Mr. Ferrers?"

"Yes, sir; very much in earnest."

Colonel North thought for a few moments. Then he replied:

"Very good, Mr. Ferrers. You are of no service whatever in the Army, I am sorry to say, though I doubt if you could possibly understand why you are of no use here. If you write your resignation before leaving this room, I will see that the resignation is forwarded, and I will then drop all idea of preferring charges against you."

Colonel North made room at his own desk, after providing the stationery. Algy wrote his resignation as an officer of the Army, signing it with a triumphant flourish.

"I am very glad to have this resignation, Mr.

Ferrers," declared Colonel North, speaking more gently at last.

"You can't be any more glad than I am to write it, sir," Algy replied, his face now beaming. "I am glad to cut loose from it all. From the very first day I've been coming more and more to the conclusion, sir, that the Army is no place for a gentleman!"

CHAPTER XV

PLANNING FOR THE SOLDIERS' HUNT

"I'LL go away on the eleven o'clock train to-morrow, sir," stated Algy, as he rose to go. "I won't bother about the few things in my room until I go to Denver and engage a man. Then I'll send my man here to pack up whatever of my belongings are worth having."

"Do you really imagine you can leave the post to-morrow, Mr. Ferrers?" demanded the colonel, a good deal astonished.

"Yes; can't I?"

"Mr. Ferrers, you are of the Army until your resignation has been accepted in the usual way."

"Haven't you accepted it, Colonel?"

"I have no authority to do so. Your resignation will have to go to Washington through the usual military channels, and can be accepted only by the authority of the President."

"Oh, that will be all right," declared Algy promptly. "I'll get my friend, Benson-Bodge, to attend to that."

"I'm afraid he can't do it for you, young man. Mr. Ferrers, you will have to remain at

this post, and perform all your duties, until the acceptance of your resignation comes in due form, and through the usual channels. And if you absent yourself from post again, without leave, I'll use the telegraph to make sure that your resignation is refused and that you are obliged to stand trial."

It took Mr. Ferrers until the next morning to recover his good spirits.

Then, immediately after the first drill—which he attended on time—Algy went over to the post telegraph station, where he picked up a blank and wrote this message to his father:

"You'll be glad to know that I'll be with you after a few days more. Have resigned from this beastly Army."

Sergeant Noll Terry was in charge of the office. He looked the message over gravely, then said:

"I am sorry, sir, but I am afraid that I cannot allow this message to go without the written approval of the post commander."

"What's the matter now?" asked Algy.

"Pardon me, sir, but you have referred to the Army in slighting terms. I am certain that Colonel North would censure me if I allowed this message to go."

"But I'm an officer—yet—so what right have you to refuse to send it, Sergeant?"

"It will have to be approved by Colonel North, or his adjutant, before I can allow it to be sent, sir," replied Noll firmly.

"Humph! But it's high time to get out of the Army when a chap can't even write his own telegrams!"

However, Ferrers thought it over for a few moments. Then he wrote this new message:

"Expect me home, soon. Have resigned from the Army."

"Is a chap allowed to send a message like that?" Algy inquired plaintively.

"Certainly, Lieutenant," Noll replied, and handed the message over to a soldier operator.

A glance at the clock in the room told Lieutenant Ferrers that he had a little time to spare before he was due at his next bit of duty. He put in the time strolling about the post. When he saw the brisk, trim-looking soldiers, and received their salutes in passing, Algy began almost to regret the Army that he had given up. Then the remembrance of gay times in the set where he had once been something of a favorite consoled him, and he looked forward to being where he did not have to answer to a colonel as a boy does to a schoolmaster.

" 'Pon my word, I think I could like the Army

very well, if they weren't so beastly strict about everything," murmured Algy to himself.

Finally a bugle blew, and Lieutenant Ferrers hastened away to another duty, which was not now so distasteful, since there was soon to be an end of it all.

"I used to think being a soldier was all parading," Algy muttered to himself. "I didn't know that there was about six months of never-ending drill behind each parade."

Just before the noon mess call Captain Cortland, in passing, called out to Hal.

"Sergeant, it is getting so well on into the fall of the year, now, that Major Silsbee has suggested to me that some of the men of B company would do well to hit the trail into the mountains."

"Another practice hike, sir?" asked Hal.

"Not exactly, Sergeant. The enlisted men of this post, to say nothing of the officers, would appreciate some supplies of game in place of the regular issues of beef and mutton. Major Silsbee has suggested that I allow some of the men of B company to form themselves into a hunting party and go away on leave into the mountains."

"That would be fine for the men who get away, sir," agreed Hal, his eyes shining at the thought.

"How would you like, Sergeant, to make up such a party and head it?" continued Captain Cortland.

"I head the hunting party? I would like it immensely, sir, but for one objection. I am not an experienced hunter."

"But you are a non-commissioned officer who would be sure to preserve whatever discipline may be needed on a hunting trip, and that is the matter of greatest importance. As to experience in hunting, there are some highly experienced hunters in B company, and you could include them in your party."

"How much discipline is needed, sir, with a hunting party?"

"Not too much," replied Captain Cortland. "A soldier's hunting party is something of a picnic affair, and discipline is relaxed as much as possible. You want just enough discipline to keep order and make the men pull together. For, on one of these hunting parties, recollect that the men are actually expected to bag enough game, and to bring it back with them."

"I thank you, Captain, and I shall be delighted if I can persuade enough of the really useful men to go with me. But I suppose you know, sir, that there is still a good deal of suspicion felt about me in barracks."

As Hal said this he flushed a bit.

"Oh, that old affair, Sergeant, of Private Green and his missing money?" replied the captain. "Sergeant, no suspicion ever justly directed itself against you, and you must deny, even to yourself, that any of the suspicion still lingers in the minds of any of the men."

"Thank you, sir."

"But you haven't answered me as to whether you will head the hunting party."

"I shall do it gladly and eagerly, sir."

"Very good; then pick out about fourteen men to go with you, and make sure that they all wish to go, as no soldier is compelled to go on a hunting trip against his own wishes. It will take you about two days to reach the hunting grounds, Sergeant, and about two days more to get back. So you shall have fourteen days' leave, which will give you about ten days of actual hunting."

"I thank you again, sir."

"Go and find your men."

"Very good, sir. May I include Sergeant Terry?"

"If he can arrange for relief at the telegraph station."

In his spare time during the rest of the day Sergeant Hal Overton was extremely happy. He was busy interviewing soldiers, and in finding out who were the most experienced hunters, for

there was big game to be had up in the mountains.

Noll was invited first of all. Terry succeeded in arranging for relief from telegraph duties, so that he could go.

Corporal Hyman proved to be one of the skilled hunters, and he at once agreed, besides suggesting others who should be invited.

"It's a great picnic, Kid Sergeant; you don't know what bully fun it is until you get there," Hyman assured Hal.

Lieutenant Ferrers dropped in at the officers' club well ahead of the dinner hour that evening.

"Yes, fellows," he drawled, "I'm going back to life and civilization. No more of this boarding school and chain-gang life for me."

The other officers present laughed good-humoredly.

"Yet, just as sure as you're alive, Ferrers, the day will come, and before long, when you'll wish yourself back once more among the regulars' uniforms."

"Maybe," sniffed Algy doubtfully.

An orderly appeared in the doorway, yellow envelope in hand.

"Telegram for Lieutenant Ferrers," he announced.

"Right here, my man. Thank you."

Algy tore open the envelope, after apologizing, and glanced at the bottom of the message.

"It's from the guv'nor," he announced. "I expect he's getting ready to kill the fatted calf against my arrival home."

Then Algy fell to reading the message. As he started his brows puckered. Once he gasped. Then, at the end, he burst forth:

"My, but the guv'nor seems almost annoyed," cried Algy, his face reddening.

"Anything serious?" inquired Holmes politely.

"Read it aloud to the rest, old chap," begged Algy, passing the telegram to Lieutenant Holmes. This was the message that the latter thereupon read aloud:

"You blithering young idiot! I worked like blazes to get you into the Army, in order to give you one last chance to grab at a little manhood. I've set the government machinery going at Washington, and your resignation won't be accepted. Within a day or two you'll receive orders to report at the Infantry School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. There you'll have to work sixteen hours out of every twenty-four, but it will make a man of you if anything can, and you'll learn all about becoming a real infantry officer. Don't send me any more news

about resigning. If you quit the Army, or are kicked out of it, I'll separate you forever from every cent of my money.

"(Signed) Donald Ferrers."

There was silence in the club parlor, until it was broken by Algy, who wailed plaintively:

"That's the guv'nor. That's the guv'nor every time. Says he'd separate me from every cent of his money. And he'd do it, too! Fellows, I'm afraid I've simply got to like the Army."

"That's your trump card, now, Algy," observed Jerrold, of A company.

"Some class about your father, Ferrers, isn't there?" asked Lieutenant Prescott.

"Oh, he's a fine old fellow," replied Algy loyally. "But he has a confoundedly abrupt way about him sometimes. You see, he didn't —er—start life exactly as a gentleman. He had to work hard most of his life to get what money he has, and I suppose—well, I guess his hard work has made him pig-headed to some extent."

Now that he knew that he would have to stay in the Army, young Ferrers found himself hating it worse than ever.

Nor did the information that his comrades offered him console him any. He was assured

that there would be no doubt about his learning all of his military duties at Fort Leavenworth—if he lived to get through the ordeal.

In the Army there is an officers' school for every branch of the service. Officers attend as "student officers"; the course is severe, but the officer seldom fails to learn whatever he goes to such a school to learn.

Two days later there were two officers leaving the post.

Algy went down to the station to take up his journey to the new station in Kansas. Despite his seeming inability to learn to be a soldier, Ferrers had made himself well enough liked personally, so many of the officers accompanied him as far as the Clowdry station.

Lieutenant Prescott was going with the hunting party. He had succeeded in procuring leave for hunting, and in getting himself invited to go along with Sergeant Hal Overton's party.

CHAPTER XVI

HAL'S GUN MAKES THE REST CURIOUS

"OH, my, but that smells good!"

The words came in a sort of ecstasy from the lips of Sergeant Noll Terry, as, gun in hand, he tramped into camp with Corporal Hyman and three others.

"Bear meat," said Slosson briefly. "Sergeant Overton and Lieutenant Prescott brought it in just before noon with their compliments."

"Where are they now?"

"Somewhere out in the world," replied Private Kelly, nodding at the mountain tops beyond. "They went out to see how much more they could get."

Slosson had mentioned the sergeant before the lieutenant, but that was not an unpardonable breach of etiquette, out here in the wilds.

More especially was it proper because Sergeant Hal, and not the handsome, fine, young West Pointer, commanded this camp and detachment.

"Where are your mates, Sarge?" inquired Slosson.

"Oh, I left my crowd," smiled Noll. "They won't be in for an hour yet, in all probability."

"Get anything, any of you?" queried Kelly.

"Not a thing, up to the time I quit," sighed Noll.

"Humph! We've all got to get a brace on us," muttered Slosson. "This is our third day in camp, and what have we killed so far? Just enough meat to satisfy the appetites we've developed up here in the hills!"

Sergeant Hal Overton's hunting detachment of the Thirty-fourth was now encamped up in the highest points, almost, of all the Colorado Rockies.

Entraining, the party had gone some sixty miles over the rails. At the station where the men detrained two heavy Army wagons had been awaiting them, these wagons having been sent on two days ahead.

On the first day after leaving the railway the hunting detachment had marched some eighteen miles; on the second day fifteen miles had been covered, and now camp was pitched more than ninety miles from Fort Clowdry.

The little village of wall tents stood some fifty feet away from where Privates Slosson and Kelly were now busy getting the evening meal.

There was still about an hour of daylight left. It was not expected that many of the hunters would be in much before the sun went down behind the western tops.

"It's chilly to-night," announced Sergeant Terry, standing back and watching the two soldiers at work.

"It's hot," grumbled Slosson, piling on more wood and stirring one of the open cook fires.

"All a matter of where you happen to be standing," laughed Noll, diving into the tent that he and Hal occupied. When Sergeant Terry came out again he had on his olive tan overcoat.

Three days of incessant hunting had been indulged in. "Enjoyed" would have been the word, only that so far the men of the detachment had not struck very heavy luck with the game.

It was not Hal's fault. He, confessedly, was not an experienced hunter in the Rockies. Corporal Hyman was an old hand at the hunt, and there were other soldiers in the detachment who could find the wild game when there was any to be found. Up to date, however, the game had been scarce. A few mountain antelope and some smaller animals—but these the hungry hunters had eaten as fast as they bagged.

The party consisted of Sergeants Overton and Terry, Corporals Hyman and Cotter, twelve privates and Lieutenant Prescott.

Mr. Prescott was not a detailed member of the detachment. He had secured leave from

the post and had asked to be accepted as a guest. For this reason the young West Pointer did not attempt to command in camp. Each morning the officer accompanied which ever party of hunters he chose.

Every day two of the soldiers were left behind for the double duty of watching the camp and of cooking the morning and evening meals. For the noon meal, or in place thereof, the hunters carried such dry food as they could stow away in their pockets.

"How big was the bear before you cut him up?" asked Noll, standing about and watching the cooks.

"About a hundred and thirty pounds, I guess," replied Slosson.

"How far away from here did they shoot him?"

"Over a mile."

"Hm! Hal must have had a long, heavy pack."

"The lieutenant was carrying the carcass when they reached camp," retorted Private Kelly. "The lieutenant did his full share in packing the meat in. That lieutenant ain't a dude."

"I know he isn't," Noll nodded quietly. "Still I didn't suppose Hal would feel like letting an officer make a pack animal of himself."

"Your bunkie ain't no dude, either, Sarge,"

continued Kelly. "Him and the lieutenant are two men of pretty near the same color."

"White isn't a color, anyway," laughed Noll.

"Maybe it isn't," assented Private Kelly.

Noll turned to look at the descending sun.

"My, I don't believe I've ever been as hungry as I am now," complained Noll.

"Nothing doing, Sarge, until the rest of the crowd comes in," grinned Slosson.

"Oh, that's easy enough for you fellows to say," grunted Noll. "You two have been in camp all day, and you had a big, filling, hot meal at noon. All I had at noon was a hard tack and a half."

"You could have carried more," insisted Slosson.

"I had more, but I didn't find water anywhere and hard tack is abominably dry stuff to get down without help."

"Go over to the bucket and help yourself to water now, Sarge," suggested Private Kelly teasingly.

"I think I will," agreed Noll, turning.

"Take a lot of it," urged Slosson. "Water, when you get enough of it, is mighty filling."

"I'll brain you, if you go on making fun of a hungry man," warned Sergeant Noll Terry, as he reached for the dipper hanging on a nail driven into a tree trunk.

"That would look like losing your temper," retorted Kelly. "Now, what are you mad with us for, Sarge? Haven't we been in camp all day, working like Chinamen just so you fellows can have something to eat when you get back from the day's stroll?"

"Well, I'm back," argued Noll.

"And you'll eat, Sarge, when the rest eat."

"What's in that oven?" queried Noll, pausing before an Army cookstove.

"Mince pie," remarked Kelly quietly.

"Oh, you fiend!" growled Sergeant Noll. "To torment a hungry man with lies like that!"

"Lies, eh?" roared the soldier. "A Kelly to stand by and have a sergeant boy tell him his mother raised a family of liars. Ye sassenach, take one peep—and then may yer stomach cave in before the meal's laid!"

Kelly cautiously opened the oven door for a brief moment, affording Noll an instant's glimpse of three browning pies.

"And there's six more of them hid here," added Kelly tantalizingly.

"And you have the cruel nerve to tell that to a man dying of starvation?" demanded Sergeant Noll with heat. "Kelly, it takes me four seconds to get my overcoat off, and only two seconds to get off the blouse underneath!"

"At that rate, how long would it take you

to undress altogether?" demanded Kelly indifferently. "For the last five minutes I've had my eyes on ye. I've been thinking how fine ye'd look in grave clothes."

"I don't have to take off many clothes, Kelly, to be down to fighting trim enough to thrash you!"

"I wouldn't take advantage of ye," protested Kelly generously. "Sure it would be no victory for a Kelly to whip a dying man."

"What's the fight about, men?" inquired a jolly voice.

Lieutenant Prescott had entered camp unnoticed. Instantly the soldiers straightened up, raising their hands to their caps in salute. Mr. Prescott returned their salutes. On first meeting the officer in the morning the men saluted him, then again when he returned from the day's hunt. For the rest of the time, at Lieutenant Prescott's own request, they treated him like one of themselves.

"This sassenach is threatening to murder me, Lieutenant," complained Kelly, "just because I showed him a pie and wouldn't let him eat it on the spot."

"That would be enough to make me commit murder, too, if I weren't a guest here," replied the lieutenant gravely, as he reached down the dipper and helped himself to a drink from the

water bucket. "How many pies have you there?"

"Nine, sir, when the three in the oven come out."

"What kind?"

"Mince."

"Um-um-um!" quoth the officer.

"The sun's going so low now, Kelly, that I'm minded to let you live another day," broke in Sergeant Noll.

"Aw, that's just because there's company present," growled Kelly, with a side glance at the lieutenant.

"Supper ready?" hailed a distant voice.

"Will be, when you come in and fetch the wood to cook with," Slosson hailed back through his hands.

A growl of desperation came from the party headed by Corporal Hyman. Then in they tramped, but they carried only their rifles.

"What have ye been doing the long day?" demanded Kelly, with a keen look at the party.

"Getting up an appetite for supper," retorted Corporal Hyman.

"But the game?"

" 'Twas so heavy we gave up carrying it," grinned Corporal Hyman.

"The boys back in barracks have had their mouths watering for game for days," grunted

Slosson. "How'll we ever break the news to 'em?"

The soldiers shook their heads blankly.

"Want a suggestion as to the gentlest way of breaking the news back home, Slosson?" inquired Lieutenant Prescott.

"We'd surely be grateful for it, sir," answered Slosson.

"Then we'll coax Sergeant Overton to wire back requesting full rations for seventeen days for seventeen men."

"It'd be a bad trick, sir."

"How so?"

"The post commissary sergeant would be that mad he'd poison the grub, sir, before shipping it."

"I believe he would," agreed Mr. Prescott thoughtfully. "For the men back in barracks are looking for at least four tons of game food."

Bang! Bang!

"Hello! What's that?" cried Noll, starting up and listening.

"Queer question for a soldier to be askin'," mocked Private Kelly.

Bang-bang-bang!

"Wirra, but that feller can't stop to take breath between his shooting," remarked Private Kelly.

"Those shots," declared Lieutenant Prescott,

"sound out in the direction where I left Sergeant Overton."

"He's struck something," declared Noll gleefully.

"Some of us had better go out there," hinted Lieutenant Prescott, rising from the campstool that he had brought out from his tent. "Either the sergeant is in trouble, or else he's bagging a wagonload of game."

"Bang-bang!" sounded the distant rifle.

"He's moving, anyway, whoever he is," declared Sergeant Noll.

"Hello, there!"

" 'Lo yerselves!" yelled back Kelly.

Another group of men came, and right after them the remainder of the hunters save one.

Bang-bang!

"Now we know it's Sergeant Overton out there," announced Lieutenant Prescott. Then he turned to Noll.

"Sergeant Terry, you're in charge. What are you going to do about it?"

CHAPTER XVII

BIG GAME AND A NIGHT IN CAMP

"IT'S a bad time to follow through the woods," remarked Corporal Cotter. "There goes the sun behind the tops."

"It'll be dark within five or six minutes more," said Noll. "If Hal Overton is running about in the woods, I think the best thing to do will be to run two lanterns up to the tree top, so that Overton can locate the camp. Then, if he's in any further difficulty, he'll fire the rifle signal. What do you think, lieutenant?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Prescott promptly. "You're in temporary command here, Sergeant Terry."

"Run up the camp lights, Johnson," Noll directed.

These lights, a red and a green one, were quickly run up on halyards to almost the top of a tall fir tree.

It was quickly dark, but camp now waited to learn the meaning of so many shots.

"Hey, there's Dinkelspiel's Comet let loose in the sky!" announced Private Johnson.

"Wrong! It's Overton waving a torch from a tree top," returned Noll, studying the flame

sweeps of the distant torch that waved. "Johnson get hold of the halyards and raise and lower the lanterns two or three times to let Sergeant Overton know that we see his signal."

The distant signalman now began waving his torch from right to left, following the regular code.

"Send—here—all—men—can—spare," read Sergeant Terry, following the torch's movements with his eyes. "Will—signal—time—to—time—till—men—arrive. Overton."

"He must be in trouble," cried Hyman.

"No; he's struck game," retorted Noll. "Johnson, raise and lower the lanterns three times to show Sergeant Overton that his signal has been read. Now, then, we'll all get out there on a hike—a fast hike. But we'll have to leave some one here who can read further signals. Lieutenant, do you mind, sir, watching further signals?"

"Why, yes," agreed young Mr. Prescott, laughing, "if you feel that I'll be of no use on the hike. But if you asked me what I'd like, I'd rather go with you."

"Very good, sir. Corporal Hyman, you will remain here and watch for further signals. Kelly and Slosson, of course, will stay by the supper. The rest—forward!"

"Guns, Sergeant?" called one of the men.

"Two of you bring rifles, in case of trouble. The rest had better be unencumbered. Forward."

Having located his bunkie's direction, Noll had little difficulty in finding the way. Most of the time they were within sight of the torch that moved from time to time.

"Hel-lo, bun-kie!" hailed Noll when the party was within an eighth of a mile of the tree.

"Hello! Glad you're here."

From the subsequent movements of the torch the approaching party knew that Overton was going down the tree. Then they saw him coming over the ground.

"What's up?" hailed Noll.

"Nothing. I've just come down," retorted Sergeant Hal.

"What have you been doing?"

"Killing game," replied Sergeant Overton, as he headed toward them.

"What kind?"

"How much?"

"All you'll want to lug back," chuckled Sergeant Hal gleefully. "Come on, now, and I'll show you. You see," Sergeant Hal continued, as the party joined him, "I got a sight at a fine antelope buck to windward and only four hundred yards away. I brought him down the first shot."

"Oh, come now, Sarge!" teased Private Johnson.

"I fired two shots, but the first toppled him," insisted Hal. "Come, look here."

Hal Overton halted under the trees, pointing with his torch.

It was certainly a fine, sleek, heavy buck to which Hal pointed.

"But you didn't need all of us to carry it in, did you?" demanded one of the men.

"Not exactly," laughed Hal happily. "Swing on to the buck, a couple of you, and come along. I'll tell you the rest. Just after I fired the second shot I heard a growl close to me. Less than a hundred yards away I heard a sound of paws moving toward me. Then I saw him. There he is."

Sergeant Overton's torch now lit up the carcass of a dead brown bear, one of the biggest that any of them had ever seen.

"And right behind him," went on Hal, "was Mrs. Bruin. I can tell you, my nerve was beginning to ooze. But I fired—and here's the lady bear."

Sergeant Hal led his soldier friends to the second bear carcass.

"But it wasn't more than a second or two later," laughed Hal, though some of the soldiers now noticed the quiver in his voice, "that I

began to think some one had locked me in with a menagerie and turned the key loose. Just beyond were a he-bear and two more females, and they were plainly some mad and headed toward me."

"Whew!" whistled Lieutenant Prescott. "What did you do?"

"Shook with the buck fever," admitted the boyish sergeant, with a laugh. "I'm not joking, either. I didn't expect to get back to camp alive, for it was growing dark in here under the trees, and I knew I couldn't depend on my shooting. I'm almost afraid I closed my eyes as I fired and kept firing. But, anyway——"

Hal stopped, holding his torch so as to show the carcass of another male bear. Not many yards away lay two females.

"An antelope and five bears!" gasped Lieutenant Prescott. "Sergeant Overton, you've qualified for the sharpshooter class in two minutes!"

"I don't claim any credit for the last three bears," insisted Hal. "I simply don't know how I hit 'em. It wasn't marksmanship, anyway."

"Nonsense!" spoke Prescott almost sharply. "It was clever shooting and uncommonly brave work."

"Brave, sir?" retorted Hal, laughingly.

"Lieutenant, do you note how my teeth are still chattering? I'm shaking all over, still, for that matter."

"Talk until morning light comes, and you can't throw any discredit either on your shooting or your nerve, Sergeant Overton. If you won't take a young officer's word for it," answered Mr. Prescott, "then ask any of the old, buck doughboys in this outfit."

"It's a job an old hunter'd brag about," glowed one of the soldiers.

Forgetting, for the time, their hunger, the men wandered from one carcass to another, examining them to see where the hits had been made.

"If you men are not going to get together soon, to pick up these animals, I'll have to tote 'em all myself," Prescott reminded them. "Terry, will you swing on under this bear with me?"

The two managed to raise it.

"Here, Lieutenant, that's not for you to do," remonstrated Sergeant Overton. "Let me take hold of your end."

"I'm not a weakling, thank you," retorted Mr. Prescott. "I'll do my share, and I recommend you to proclaim that any man who doesn't do his share doesn't eat to-night. But as for you, Sergeant Overton, I shall have a bad

opinion of this outfit if they let you carry anything more than your rifle back to camp this night."

And that motion was carried unanimously. Sergeant Hal was forced to go ahead as guide, while the others, the lieutenant included, buckled manfully to their burdens.

Not infrequently they had to halt and rest, for the carcasses were fearfully heavy, even for men as toughened as regulars.

Yet, finally, they did manage to get Hal's prizes back to camp.

"Another day or two like this, and we needn't be ashamed to face the men back at Clowdry," observed Lieutenant Prescott complacently. "Six bears and a buck antelope in one day is no fool work, even if one man did do it all."

"But you killed the bear this morning, sir," urged Sergeant Hal.

"Yes, Sergeant; after you had fired the first shot and had crippled the beast so that it couldn't get away from me."

Not even to gloat over the big haul of game, however, could the men wait any longer for their long-deferred evening meal.

There was a general washup, after which the entire party went to table.

Lieutenant Prescott permitted one concession to his rank. He sat at table with the enlisted

men, but he had one end of the board all to himself.

Two ruddy campfires now shed their glow over the table. It was a rough scene, but one full of the sheer joy of outdoor, manly life.

"I hope, Kelly, that the long wait hasn't encouraged to-night's bear meat to dry up in the pans," remarked the lieutenant pleasantly.

"No fear o' that, sir," replied the soldier cook. "Instead, the meat had simmered so long in its own juices that a thin pewter fork would pick it to pieces."

"How much meat is there?" asked Private Johnson, whereat all the men laughed as happily as schoolboys on a picnic.

"Never ye fear, glutton," retorted Kelly. "There's more meat than any seventeen giants in the fairy tales could ever eat at one sitting."

And then on it came—great hunks of roast bear meat, flanked with browned potatoes and gravy; flaky biscuits, huge pats of butter, bowls heaped with canned vegetables. Pots of steaming coffee passed up and down the table.

Hunters in the wilds get back close to nature, and have the appetites of savages. These men around the camp table ate, every man of them, twice as much as he could have eaten back at company mess at Fort Clowdry.

Then, to top it all, came more coffee and mince

pie in abundance. Nor did these hardy hunters, after climbing the mountain trails all day, fear the nightmare. Their stomachs were fitted to digest anything edible!

It was over at last, and pipes came out here and there, though not all of the soldiers smoked.

Hal Overton was one of those who did not smoke. He had brought out his rubber poncho and a blanket, and had placed these on the frosty ground at some distance from one of the camp-fires.

"You are looking rather thoughtful, Sergeant," observed Lieutenant Prescott, strolling over to Overton. "I hope I am not interrupting any train of thought."

"No, sir."

"May I sit down beside you?"

"Certainly, sir."

Sergeant Hal moved over, making plenty of room on his blanket. Officer and non-com. stretched themselves out comfortably, each resting on one elbow.

"Nevertheless, Sergeant," continued Mr. Prescott, "you were thinking of something very particular when I came along."

"I was just thinking, sir, how jolly this life is, and for that matter, how jolly everything connected with the Army is. I was wondering why so many young fellows let their earlier man-

hood slip by without finding out what an ideal place the Army is."

"But what is especially jolly just now, Sergeant," replied the lieutenant, "is the hunting. Now, men don't have to enter the Army in order to have all the hunting they want."

"But we're drawing our pay while here," returned Overton. "And we are having our expenses paid, too. The man in civil life doesn't get that. If he hunts, he must do it at his own expense. Then there's another point, sir. In the case of the average hunting party of men from civil life it must be hard to find a lot of really good fellows, who'll keep their good nature all through the hardships of camping. For instance, where, in civil life, could you get together seventeen fellows, all of them as fine fellows and as agreeable as we have here? But I beg the lieutenant's pardon. I didn't intend to include him as one of the crowd, for the rest are all enlisted men."

"I want to be considered one of the crowd," replied the young officer simply.

"But you're not an enlisted man, sir."

"No; but I've cast my lot with the Army for life, and so, I trust, have most of you enlisted men. Therefore we all belong together, though not all can be officers. For that matter, I imagine there are a good many men in the

ranks of our battalion who wouldn't care to be officers. Many soldiers are of a happy-go-lucky type, and wouldn't care to burden themselves with an officer's responsibilities. Yet I certainly want to be, as far as good discipline will permit, one of the crowd along with all good, staunch and loyal soldiers, whatever their grades of rank may be."

This was seeing the commissioned officer of Uncle Sam's Army in a somewhat different light, even to one as keen and observing as Hal Overton.

In garrison life it is very seldom that the enlisted man gets a real glimpse of the "man side" of the officer. The requirements of military discipline are such that officers and enlisted men do not often mingle on any terms of equality. This fact, as far as the American Army goes, is based on the military experience of ages that, when officers and men mingle on terms of too much equality, discipline suffers sadly. It is this intimacy of officers and men that keeps many National Guard organizations from reaching greater efficiency.

Men have served through a whole term of enlistment in the regular Army without realizing how friendly a really good and capable officer always feels toward the really good enlisted men under his command. The captain of a com-

pany, is, in effect, the father of his company, and his time must be spent largely in looking after the actual welfare and happiness of his men. In this work the captain's lieutenants are his assistants.

Soon the night grew much colder in this high altitude. Now the wood was heaped on one fire, and around this blazing pile soldiers sat or stretched themselves on blankets and ponchos. It is at such a time that the soldier's yarns crop up. Story after story of the military life was told. All in good time Lieutenant Prescott contributed his share, from anecdotes of the old days at West Point.

Then it became so late that Sergeant Hal announced that Johnson and Dietz would have the camp detail for the day following. This meant, also, that Johnson and Dietz would therefore divide between them the duty of watching over the camp through the night.

It was Johnson who took the first trick of the watch, while the others turned in in their tents.

Holding his rifle across his knees, mainly as a matter of form, Johnson sat down by the campfire, while his drowsy comrades turned in in their tents and slept the sleep of the strong in that clear, crisp Colorado air.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOLDING UP A CAMP GUARD

HALF an hour before daylight was due everyone in the camp was stirring.

The two new cooks for the day had their work cut out for them. Other soldiers busied themselves with hauling wood and water.

Then, too, the four horses belonging to the transport wagons had to be curried, watered and fed.

By the time these first duties were out of the way broad daylight had come and breakfast was ready.

The meal over "police," or cleaning up, was performed as carefully as in barracks.

The hunters were now ready to set out, for, in the meantime, the antelope and bears killed the afternoon before had been skinned and the meat hung up in the dry, cool air.

"Anybody in this outfit been wearing moccasins?" queried Corporal Hyman, strolling back into camp.

No one admitted it.

"Then we've been having visitors in the night," continued Hyman. "No less than four of them, either, for the prints are right under

that tree over there, and they lead down to the trail."

"Moccasins? Indians, then?" thrilled Private William Green, who was one of the hunting party.

"Sorry to spoil your dream of glory in an Indian fight, Green," laughed the lieutenant, "but the last Indian in these parts died years ago."

"But what can the moccasins mean?" pondered Sergeant Hal aloud. "If there have been visitors about, and honest ones, they would naturally let themselves be announced. Dietz, you had the last trick of watch?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Did you see or hear any prowlers?"

"Nary one, Sergeant."

"Corporal Hyman, take me over to the moccasin prints. Lieutenant, do you mind taking a look at them, too, sir?"

Mr. Prescott stepped over in the wake of Hyman and Overton.

"There are the prints," declared the corporal, pointing. "On account of the hard ground they're not very distinct, but there were four of the fellows."

"More likely five," supplemented Lieutenant Prescott, pointing to still another set of footmarks.

"Here are other prints over here," called Sergeant Overton. "Aren't these still a different set?"

"Yes," agreed both the lieutenant and Corporal Hyman.

"Then there were at least six men prowling about here while we slept in the night," concluded Hal.

"And here is one of the trails," called the lieutenant, "leading toward camp."

"Suppose we follow the trail?" suggested the young sergeant.

They did so, halting at the end of the trail.

"From here I can see where the stool of the guard rested near the fire," continued Overton. "From that it would seem fair to conclude that one of the prowlers got this far, found our guard awake, and then retired."

"It would be interesting to know who our visitors were," nodded Lieutenant Prescott.

"I've changed my mind about going hunting to-day," went on Sergeant Hal. "While the rest of you are out after game I am going to remain right here."

"The camp is guarded by two reliable men," remarked Mr. Prescott.

"True enough, sir, but they're not real guards, for both will have their hands full with camp housework," objected the boyish sergeant.

"They can't do real guard duty, or else we'd all have to turn to get the evening meal in a rush. So I've decided to remain behind today."

"And, on the whole, I think you're wise to do it, Sergeant," approved the lieutenant.

So, while the main party hied itself away soon after, Hal Overton remained behind with the two camp duty men.

Having a couple of good books in his tent, Sergeant Hal donned his olive tan Army overcoat, spread a poncho and a pair of blankets on the ground and lay down to read.

But his rifle and ammunition belt rested beside him.

The morning passed without any event, other than two or three times Sergeant Overton paused long enough in his reading to do some brief scouting past the camp.

Nothing came of it, however. At noon Hal ate with Dietz and Johnson.

"The chuck is better back in camp," laughed the young sergeant. "But I've heard a gun half a dozen times this morning, and each time I've been curious to know how the hunting luck is running."

"Nobody will beat the haul you made yesterday, Sarge," offered Private Dietz.

"Oh, I'd like to see several of the fellows beat

it," rejoined Overton. "I certainly hope to see both wagons go back loaded to the top with game. I don't want to have the only military command I ever enjoyed being the head of go back stumped."

"We're not stumped, with five bear carcasses," hinted Private Johnson.

"Those carcasses might afford two meat meals to the garrison," speculated Sergeant Overton. "But what we want to do is to take back so much game flesh that no man in Fort Clowdry will want to hear game meat mentioned again before next spring."

"Huh! By that time the old Thirty-fourth will probably be in the Philippines," retorted Dietz, forking eight ounces more of wood-broiled bear steak to his tin plate.

"I wonder!" cried Hal, his eyes blazing with eagerness.

"Crazy to get out to the islands, Sarge?"

"Humph! I put in three years there with the Thirty-fourth," grunted Dietz. "I'll never kick at a transfer to another regiment whenever the regiment I'm in gets the islands route."

"What have you against the Philippines?" Hal wanted to know.

"Well, Sarge, don't you enjoy this cool, crisp, bracing air up here in the hills?"

"Certainly. Who wouldn't? This air is bracing—life-giving."

"Nothing like it in the Philippines," answered Dietz. "It's hot there—hot, you understand."

"Yet I've been told that a soldier always needs his blankets there at night," objected Hal.

"Yes; if you have to sleep outdoors, then you need your full uniform on, including shoes and leggings, and you wrap yourself up tight in your blanket. But that isn't to keep warm; it's to keep the mosquitoes from eating you alive. So, after you get done up in your blanket, you put a collapsible mosquito net over your head to protect your face and neck. Then there's a trick you have to learn of wrapping your hands in under your blanket in such a way that the skeeters can't follow inside. After you've been in the islands a few weeks you learn how to do yourself up so that the skeeters can't get at your flesh."

"Then that ought to be all right," smiled Hal hopefully.

"Yes; but you never heard a Filipino skeeter holler when he's mad. When they find they can't get at you then about four thousand settle on your net and blanket and sing all night. You've got to be fagged out before you can sleep over the racket those little pests make."

"I guess the whole trick can be learned," predicted Overton.

"The night trick can be learned after a while," agreed Dietz. "But, in the daytime, there's nothing that can be done to protect you. You simply have to suffer. Then the hot days! Why, Sarge, I've marched north up the tracks of the Manila & Dagupan railroad, carrying fifty pounds of weight, on days when the sun sure beat down on us at the rate of a hundred and forty degrees Fahrenheit."

"Yet you're alive, now," observed Overton.

"Oh, yes; just as it happens."

"But surely there's some marching in the shade, too?"

"Oh, yes; sometimes you spend the whole day, everyday for a fortnight, hiking through the dense jungles after a gang of bolomen or Moros or ladrones. Shade enough there in the jungle, but it has a Turkish bath beaten to a plum finish. You drip, drip, drip with perspiration, until you'd give a week's pay to be out in the sun for ten minutes with a chance to get dried off."

"I'm going to like it, just the same," retorted Hal. "I know I am. And, if the natives put up any real trouble for us, then we'll see some actual service. That's what a very young soldier always aches for, you know, Dietz."

"Yes, and it's sure fun fighting those brown-skinned little Filipino goo-goos," grunted the older soldier. "First they fire on you, and then you and your comrades lie down and fire back. After you've had a few men hit the order comes to charge. Then you all rise and rush forward, cheering like the Fourth of July. You have to go through some tall grass on the way, and, first thing you know, a parcel of hidden bolo men jump up right in front of you. They use their bolos—heavy knives—to slit you open at the belt line. Ugh! I'd sooner fight five men with guns than step on one of those bolo men in the jungle!"

"Just the same," voiced the young sergeant, " the sooner the Thirty-fourth is ordered to the island the better I'll like it. I'm wild to see some of the high foreign spots."

"Wish I could give you all the chances that are coming to me in my service in the Army," grunted Private Dietz, as he rose from the table.

The afternoon was one of harder work for the two camp duty men. Hal tried to read again, but found his thoughts too frequently wandering to the Philippines.

The afternoon waxed late, at last, though still there was no sign of the hunters. Once in a while a gun had been heard at some distance, and that was all.

All the time Sergeant Hal had trailed his rifle about camp with him. Now, tiring of reading, he went to his tent, standing his rifle against the front tent pole.

Hearing a swift step the young sergeant reached the tent flap in time to see a roughly-dressed, moccasined white man running away with Hal's Army rifle.

Then, in the same instant, he heard a voice call:

"Throw your hands up there, man!"

"Holding me up with my own gun, are you?" raged Private Dietz.

"Yes; and we've got the other chap's lead-piece, too. Up with your hands, both of you."

Hal dropped back behind the flap of his tent, peering out through a little crack in the canvas.

There were now seven men outside, all strangers, all rough-looking and all moccasined.

Between them they had the three rifles belonging in camp that day.

"Bring out that other fellow, the kid sergeant," commanded the same voice, after Dietz and Johnson, hopelessly surprised, had hoisted their hands skyward.

"Humph!" growled Sergeant Hal, his eyes snapping. "I don't like the idea of surrendering the camp that I command!"

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN THE LAST CARTRIDGE WAS GONE

WHATEVER was to be done would have to be done in a very few seconds.

For one of the rifle-armed strangers had started briskly for the tent that concealed the boyish sergeant.

"Whatever happens, he isn't going to get me alive, if I can help it!" quivered young Overton. "I'd sooner be killed at once than disgrace my chevrons."

Two swift steps backward, and Sergeant Hal caught up his revolver.

With this in his right hand, and stepping panther-like, he returned to the fallen tent flap.

The approaching man with the rifle bent forward, sweeping the tent flap aside.

"Come out, Sarge!" he ordered.

"If I have to," retorted Hal, setting his teeth.

Grasping the revolver by the barrel end, he sprang through, before the other fellow could comprehend what was happening.

"Look out, there!" yelled one of the invaders, coming up behind the man with the rifle.

It was too late.

Crack! It was a fearful blow, the butt of the heavy Army revolver landing on the fellow's jaw and fracturing it.

"O-o-o-h!"

It was a wail of fearful agony, but under the circumstances Sergeant Overton could not afford to regret it.

The stricken man staggered back.

Hal poised for a bound, intending to snatch the rifle from him.

As the fellow dropped back, however, his companion coming up behind him was in time to snatch the rifle, turning the muzzle on Overton.

There being not a second to lose, and the fight unequal, Hal darted, instead, back to his tent pole.

There hung a mirror that he had used in shaving.

It took but an instant to get this. Then Hal raced for a tree thirty feet away.

Dropping the small mirror into a pocket, Overton started to climb the tree.

"Come down out of that tree, or we'll bring you down!" roared an ugly voice.

"You'll have to drop me, then, if you want me," taunted Hal coolly.

He was a dozen feet up the trunk by the time that the man who now held that rifle gained the base of the tree.

"Coming down, you——?" called the ruffian with an oath.

"No," responded Hal. "Coming up?"

"Come down, I tell you!"

"Some mistake," sneered Hal, still climbing. "I'm headed for the roof."

Below him he heard a threatening click as the bolt of the rifle was thrown back.

"Hey! Don't shoot the kid—yet," ordered another voice. "He'll come down when he sees what we can do to him. He hasn't any show."

So the fellow under the tree went back to join his six companions.

Dietz and Johnson were still holding up their hands. This fact was no reflection on their courage. They were trained fighting men, and had sense enough to realize when the enemy had "the drop" on them.

"You two soldiers," ordered the leader of the ruffians, "lie down on your faces and hold your hands behind your backs for tying."

Neither soldier, however, stirred as yet.

"You heard that, Sergeant?" called Deitz dryly.

"Yes," admitted Hal.

"What shall we do?"

"You fellows get down on your faces—flop!" broke in the leader of the ruffians. "That's what you'll do!"

"Will you be kind enough to shut up?" retorted Private Dietz coolly. "We're taking our orders from the sergeant."

"Let him come down here and give the orders, then," jeered the leader of the invaders.

"You'd better give in, Dietz and Johnson," order Sergeant Hal. "You can't do anything and I don't want to see you killed."

"That's your order, then, is it, sergeant?" inquired Private Johnson.

"Yes; it can't be helped."

Dietz and Johnson, therefore, lay down as directed. Some of the scoundrels who were not armed busied themselves with tying the soldiers, and this work the miscreants did with a thoroughness that spoke eloquently of practice.

But the diversion gave Hal a chance to do something that had popped into his head at the instant when he had stepped back for the mirror.

The sun was still sufficiently high for him to catch the rays strongly on his small mirror.

Now, in the Army signaling work, one branch has to do with heliographing; that is, flashing a message by means of reflected rays of the sun's light.

Swiftly enough the young sergeant caught the flash, and found to his delight that he was able to throw a fairly long flash.

"Camp in hands of ruffians. Help quick!"

The Mirror Was Shot From Hal's Hand.

Despite his tremendous excitement, Sergeant Overton endeavored to steady his right hand enough to enable him to send the message quite clearly.

Again and again he flashed the message, until one of the invaders, glancing up at the tree top, caught sight of the work that was going on.

"That kid's trying to send word to some one," guessed the leader. "Here, cub, hand me that rifle."

Crack!

Smash!

It was a true shot, though how much of it was due to luck Sergeant Hal could not surmise.

But the glass was shot from his hand, the splintered bits falling to the ground.

"Next shot for you, kid!" warned the marksman below.

"Yes?" mocked Overton.

"Surest thing in the world? Coming down, or shall I bring you down?"

Crack!

Hal drew his own weapon up, firing as the sight passed the human target.

It was a close shot, the revolver bullet carrying away the fellow's cloth cap.

"I'm firing too high," spoke Hal as composedly as though he did not feel any excitement. "I'll fire for your belt line after this."

That was too much for the ruffian's composure. He turned, running in a zig-zag line.

So Hal held his fire, awaiting results for a moment. As he waited he felt for his revolver ammunition.

Then he made a sickening discovery. He had no revolver ammunition beyond the five cartridges remaining in the cylinder of his weapon.

As for the invaders, they had more than three hundred rounds of rifle ammunition now at their disposal.

And they had fled to cover, too, but now Sergeant Overton had the uncomfortable conviction that three rifles were trained on him.

"Now, come down out of that tree on the double quick!" commanded the leader of the invaders.

"My coming will suit myself only," boasted Hal in a tone conveying ten times the confidence that he felt.

"That shot of yours may start help this way," continued the leader threateningly. "We ain't going to take any chances. Start on the second, or we'll begin shooting, and keep it up until we tumble you out of that tree."

"You may fire whenever ready," mocked Hal. "Every shot you fire will be a signal that will make my friends come faster."

Bang! It was the leader himself who fired.

The bullet clipped off a leaf within an inch of Sergeant Overton's ear.

Crack! The boyish young sergeant was all there with the grit. He fired straight back at the leader, the bullet striking the rock before the other's face.

Now two more shots clipped close to the young soldier. Hal answered with one.

But he tried to steady himself. He realized that he had but three fighting shots left, and that he must make them count.

"But maybe three are enough to last me as long as I'm going to live, anyway," reflected Sergeant Overton grimly.

There was not much comfort in that thought, but Hal drew himself around more behind the tree trunk in order to shield himself as much as possible, although the tree trunk would be no real protection from bullets.

The Army bullet, at an ordinary range, will pierce three solid feet of standing oak.

CHAPTER XX

THE EIGHTH MOCCASIN APPEARS

"GIVE it up?" queried the leader.

"I answered you before on that head," retorted Sergeant Overton.

"Don't be a fool, kid. We don't want to hurt you. All we want is that revolver."

"I don't want to give it up," rejoined Hal.

"You'd better!"

"It isn't mine to give, anyway. It belongs to the United States Government."

"Uncle Sam will never see that revolver again," declared the leader of the invaders, with profane emphasis. "And you'll never see your friends again if you don't hit it fast for the ground."

"I'm here until further orders."

"You've got your orders!"

"I don't take any orders from you," retorted Hal with fine scorn.

"Open up on the fool, boys—all together!"

Three spurts of flame jetted out from the cover that the ruffians had taken.

Hal steadied his arm by resting it across a branch before him, and fired back, his aim, as before, at the leader.

He had the satisfaction of seeing that rascal's head duck below cover.

Though he could not know it then, Overton had clipped a lock of hair from the fellow's hatless head.

Another volley, which Hal answered with another shot.

"What do you fellows want with guns if you can't shoot better?" hailed Overton derisively.

He didn't want them to shoot any better, but he was trying to anger them and thus make their shooting wilder.

"It won't take us more than half a minute more to get you," flung back the leader.

Now that fellow raised himself, exposing himself more, but getting a solid left-hand rest for his rifle.

Hal could see and feel that the rifle was pointed fairly at him.

On the instinct of the moment the young sergeant fired. And he would have scored, had he not seen the other two riflemen leaving their cover also to get a better aim. That realization spoiled his shot.

"Gracious! That was my last cartridge, too!" groaned the young sergeant inwardly.

The realization made him feel creepy. It is one thing to fight bravely, when one has the fighting tools and a knowledge of their use. But

it is quite another thing to face the certainty of being helpless with so many armed foes bent on one's destruction.

None the less, summoning up all his courage, Hal broke the revolver at the breech, allowing the ejector to shed the empty shells on the ground underneath.

With lightning motions Hal went through the sham of filling his cylinder with fresh cartridges.

"No use, little man! No use at all. If you had any more cartridges you'd get me now—but you can't. Come on, boys! We'll go under the tree and smoke him out!"

As he spoke, the leader moved boldly from cover, exposing the whole length of his body.

It would have made a splendid mark for as expert a shot as Sergeant Hal Overton. The soldier boy did raise his revolver, as though to shoot, but the leader, coolly confident, continued to come forward.

Of course Hal could not shoot, and the rest seeing that, also came out from cover.

Chuckling, all but the one whose jaw Hal had injured, the wretches moved forward, halting just under the tree.

"Coming down now?" demanded the leader, directing the muzzle of his stolen rifle up the tree.

"I don't know," mimicked Hal.

"Ever hear what the treed 'coon said to Davy Crockett?" inquired the scoundrel facetiously.

"If it's a chestnut I'll stand hearing it again," proposed the young sergeant.

"Well, friend, when the raccoon saw Davy pointing his gun upward, he called down: 'Don't shoot, Davy! I'll come down.' "

"Great!" mocked young Overton.

"Are you going to do like the 'coon?"

Hal's answer was to raise his right hand suddenly and hurling his now useless revolver.

There was no time to dodge. One of the riflemen below received the impact of the descending weapon squarely on top of his head and he keeled over, falling into a bush.

"You said all you wanted was my revolver," announced Sergeant Hal. "Well, you have it. Now on your way with it."

The dropped revolver had been picked up by another of the crowd, and now two men raised their guns to shoot Hal Overton out of the tree.

But their leader struck down their guns.

"None of that, unless we have to," he commanded. "The sergeant's a game one, and he's not to blame for trying to defend his camp. He can't do any more harm now, and I won't have him hurt unless he forces us to do it. Now, then, young man, are you coming down out of that tree?"

"Why?" challenged Hal. "You said that all you wanted was my revolver. You have that now, and all the rifles in camp. What do you need of me?"

"We've got to slip away from here quick," retorted the leader with a deceptive show of good-nature and fair-mindedness. "But do you think, Sergeant, we're going to be fools enough to dust out of here and leave you to come down out of the tree and trail us along, then come back here for help and bag us all. No, no, young man! We know the regulars, and we're not going to leave any cards in the hands of the fighting line of the Army."

"But it's so comfortable up here," objected Hal.

"I'm going to give you, Sergeant, until I count three. Then, if you haven't started, we'll simply have to bring you down like a cantankerous grizzly. Or, if you start and then stop again, we'll shoot just the same. We can't afford to waste any more time talking."

Where had Hal seen this man before? Where and when had he heard that voice?

Face and voice both seemed strangely familiar, yet, to save him, Overton could not place the fellow at that moment.

"One!" counted the leader, and Hal saw three rifle muzzles pointed at him.

"Two!"

"All right! I'm the 'coon. Be with you in a minute, Davy Crockett," laughed Sergeant Hal Overton.

It was hard luck, but the soldier boy felt that he had made all the fight that could be expected of any one. There seemed no sense in being killed for sheer stubbornness, now that he had not a ghost of a chance of fighting back.

Having once started groundward, Overton continued to descend rapidly.

As he reached the last limb on his descent he took a swift slide and landed among his captors.

"Good boy," mimicked the leader of the invaders. "Now continue to be sensible. Just lie down on your face and put your hands behind your back the way your two men did. Nothing happened to them and nothing worse will happen to you."

The wretch's words were smooth and oily. To Hal it really looked as though this fellow respected gameness enough not to take it out on a defenseless enemy.

So Hal lay face downward and gave up his hands for binding.

Wrap! wrap! He felt the cord passing swiftly around his wrists, and then an extra turn was taken around his ankles.

"Your name's Overton, isn't it?" asked the leader with a wicked grin on his face.

"Yes."

"Then you're the man we want."

"From the way you acted I judged that you wanted me," mocked Hal dryly.

"Yes; but we wanted you for more than general reasons. In fact, we want you, most of all, for purely personal reasons. Or, at least, one of our fellows does. Here he comes."

An eighth man of the wretched crew now came swiftly forward from the hiding that he had kept from the first.

As he came he chuckled maliciously, and Hal Overton knew that sinister laugh.

Then the fellow halted, bending over the prostrate, tied young sergeant.

The face was the face of that evil deserter from the Army—ex-Private Hinkey!

CHAPTER XXI

THE ENEMY HAS HIS INNINGS

"I'D much better have stayed up the tree and been shot out of it!" flashed through Sergeant Hal's startled brain.

"Howdy!" jeered Hinkey, leering wickedly. "Didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"No," Hal admitted frankly.

"It's my inning now, Overton."

"It looks like it."

"And I'm to have my own way with you—you officers' boot-lick!"

"That's a lie, Hinkey, and you know it!" broke in the deep, indignant voice of Private Dietz. "Overton's a man, first, last and always. He's worth a million of your kind."

"Good!" added Private Johnson valiantly. "And true, too! I never realized it until to-day, either."

"Oh, you both hold your tongues," ordered Hinkey, glaring over at the pair of bound soldiers who lay beyond. "You fellows are no good, either. No man that'll stay in the Army is any good."

"I'm glad to know why you left, Hinkey," jeered Dietz. "I've wondered a lot about that."

"Oh, have you?" snarled Hinkey. "Nobody but a boot-lick would stay in the Army, and I don't lick any man's boots, not for the whole Army."

"Come, hurry up, Hink, and have your grudge satisfied, and come along,. We don't want to be caught by a lot of soldiers. All the shooting we've done here will be sure to attract the hunters."

"No it won't," rejoined Hinkey. "We trailed the hunting parties, and they went out in three squads, in three different directions. Now, any of the hunters that hear a lot of firing will only think that one of the other parties has run into a lot of game."

This was true. Hal Overton hadn't thought of it before in that light. And, in addition, it was rather unlikely that any of the hunters had chanced to see his mirror-thrown signals in the short time that had passed before the glass had been shot from his hands.

The rascal floored by the revolver which the sergeant had thrown was now coming to, for one of the crew had been dashing water in his face.

Not far away sat the man whose jaw Hal had damaged. He was groaning a bit, despite his efforts to make no fuss.

"Look at our two mates this sergeant boy

has put out of action," growled Hinkey, trying to inflame his comrades.

"They were hit in fair fight," replied the leader. "The sergeant kid doesn't belong to our side, but I don't hold his fighting grit against him."

"You'd hold anything and everything against him if you knew him as well as I do," retorted Hinkey.

He was still standing over his young victim, gazing down gloatingly at him.

"And now the time has come to square matters up with you, younker," went on Hinkey tauntingly. "It's all my way now."

Hal looked up at him steadily, but without speaking. The boy knew better than to say anything foolish that would needlessly anger this brute, who now held the situation all in his own hands.

"Well, why don't you talk back, Overton?" demanded Hinkey sneeringly.

Just the ghost of a smile flickered over Overton's face.

"Laughing at me, are you?" yelled Hinkey, trying to work himself into a more brutal rage.

Hal spoke at last.

"No," he answered.

"If you ain't laughing," continued the brute, "what are you doing?"

"Just thinking how sorry I am for you," Hal flashed back coolly.

"Sorry?" echoed the fellow bitterly. "You'd better waste your sorrow on yourself! What are you feeling badly about me for?"

"I was thinking," went on Hal slowly, and with no trace of taunt in his voice, "what a sad come-down you have had. You were in the Army, wearing its uniform, and with every right to look upon yourself as a man. You could have gone on being trusted. You could have raised yourself. Instead, you have followed a naturally bad bent and made yourself a thousand times worse than you ever needed to be. Hinkey, do you wonder that I'm sorry for you, when I find that you have fallen outside of an honest man's estate?"

"Good! Tell him some more, Sarge," came from Dietz.

"Do you hear that?" raged Hinkey, turning and catching his new leader's eye. "Do you hear what the boot-lick insinuates about the new crowd I've joined?"

"It's your affair—your battle, Hinkey," replied the leader grimly. "Don't try to drag us in."

"You're making such a beast of yourself, Hinkey, that even your own gang don't respect you," taunted Johnson.

"A crowd of Colorado wild-cats couldn't respect such a fellow," supplied Dietz.

With a snarl Hinkey ran over to where Dietz and Johnson lay, giving each a hard kick. The soldiers suffered the violence in silence.

"You two mind your own affairs," warned Hinkey savagely. "Don't turn me against you. I don't want to give either of you as bad a dose as I've planned for this sergeant boy."

"Hurry up, Hinkey," warned the leader impatiently. "You're wasting time that's worth more to us than money. You said that if we'd capture this boy for you, you'd cart him away on your back, to settle with him later. Now do it!"

"All in a minute," promised the deserter. "But, first of all, are you going to take the other two soldiers with you?"

"No. We don't need 'em."

"Then I don't want this fellow Overton to go along with us with his eyes open. He'd know our whole route if he managed to get away from us, and then he'd bring the regulars down on us. You don't want that?"

"Of course not."

"Then I'll stun this sergeant boy, and I'll do it so hard that he won't open his eyes in ten miles of traveling," promised Hinkey.

With that he turned to Hal.

"Overton, I'm going to hit you, and I'm going to hit you so hard that you won't even see stars. Close your eyes if you're afraid to see the blow coming!"

But Hal merely opened his eyes the wider, smiling back with a confidence in himself that maddened the brute.

With a snarl like a panther's Hinkey crouched over the young sergeant, holding his hand high before striking.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NAVY HEARD FROM

LOOKING up at that hand Hal Overton saw a spot of blood appear suddenly in the middle of the palm.

In the same moment there came the sharp crack of a rifle.

The blow never descended on Overton's upturned face.

Instead, Hinkey uttered a startled yell, tottered to his feet, then threw himself over on his face.

For, following that first shot, came a volley of them, accompanied by the whistling of bullets through the camp.

The leader of the invaders pitched and fell, shot through the hip.

"Take to cover, boys!" roared the stricken leader. "Take my rifle, too. Defend yourselves. The soldiers are down on us!"

But Sergeant Hal, after that first moment of joyous surprise, felt a thrill of astonishment.

The bullets that were whistling through camp had not the sound of Army missiles!

Yet the young sergeant had no time to speculate on this discovery, for now he heard a voice,

and a wholly strange one, shout, as the volley ceased:

"You men surrender, if you don't want to be riddled. If you start to make a move away from camp we'll drop every one of you before any man can reach cover. We mean business!"

"Hello! What's going on here? Halt! Deploy, there! Lie down! Ready—load—aim!"

That was Noll Terry's voice, and the young sergeant was right on his word like a flash.

While the first party was hidden behind cover to the northward, Sergeant Noll and his men had come up from the westward.

"We're friends," hailed that same voice from northward. "Who are you over to the westward? Who commands there?"

"Sergeant Oliver Terry, United States Army," Noll called back.

"Good for you, Sergeant! Stay in command. We'll back up any move you make," came from northward.

"Do you rascally prowlers surrender?" called Noll.

"It's about the only thing that seems left to do," sullenly admitted the leader of the invaders.

"Then hold up your hands and step away from those rifles," ordered Noll.

That command was obeyed, except by the

man whose head had been battered by Hal's flying revolver.

"Have they any other weapons, Hal?" called Sergeant Noll.

"So far as I know they haven't," Sergeant Hal answered.

"You to the north!" called Noll.

"Ahoy, there!" came the good-natured answer.

"Will you move in, covering the prisoners with your rifles?"

"Gladly, Sergeant."

"Thank you."

Out of brushwood cover to the northward stepped three men. One was a middle-aged man, a mountaineer if dress and manner went for anything.

With him, supporting this guide on each side were two tall, very straight young men who appeared to be about twenty-three years of age each. These younger men were nattily though plainly attired in corduroy, with leggings and caps.

"Just stand right there, and hold the prisoners, please," directed Sergeant Terry.

Then Noll's next step was to move in with his own men, four in number.

"Get the handcuffs," directed Noll. "I think we've enough to go around."

So saying Noll stepped over to his chum, quickly freeing him.

"Get up, Sergeant Overton," cried Noll, as he cut the last cord at his chum's ankles. "And now I turn the command over to you."

Most of the prisoners took their capture in an ugly mood. Their leader, however, affected, coolly, to regard it all as the fortunes of the game.

"Here don't handcuff any of the disabled men," directed Sergeant Hal. "Green, you stand as a guard over those wounded. It's bad enough to be hurt, without having one's hands fixed so that he can't aid himself any in his misery."

"You want Hinkey ironed, don't you?" inquired Noll.

"No."

"But he's an Army deserter."

"If he gets away from where he's sitting he'll be only the remains of one," returned Sergeant Overton dryly. "But Hinkey is wounded, and he'll need his hands free in order to look after himself."

Hinkey, however, did not deign to notice this grace by so much as a look or a word.

"What are you going to do with these fellows?" asked Noll presently.

"It doesn't rest with me," Hal replied. "This

is a purely military matter, and I shall wait to get Lieutenant Prescott's orders."

"Then Prescott belongs with this camp?" queried the taller, finer-looking of the pair of young strangers who had given Hal his first aid.

"Lieutenant Prescott is with this camp; yes, sir," Hal replied, laying considerable emphasis on the title.

"We're friends of his," explained the same stranger. "So, if you don't mind, we'll just wait for him."

"If you're friends of Lieutenant Prescott, then make yourselves very much at home, sir," Hal answered cordially. "Any friend of Lieutenant Prescott has B company for his friends also."

Johnson and Dietz, who had been freed right after Sergeant Hal, were now busy once more with preparations for the extra meal.

"Had we better provide for three extra plates, Sarge?" inquired Johnson, in a low voice.

"It looks very much that way," smiled Hal. "And be sure to have a great plenty of everything. Vreeland will help you, as you've lost some time."

Ten minutes later the footsteps of others were heard approaching camp. Then in came Lieutenant Prescott, with Corporal Cotter and

five men. They were carrying two antelope and a fine, big bear.

But the instant that Lieutenant Prescott caught sight of the strangers he dropped everything, rushing forward with outstretched hands.

"By all that's wonderful! Dave Darrin! Dan Dalzell!"

Then the soldiers were treated to the unexpected spectacle of their lieutenant embracing the two young men in corduroy.

Soon after, however, Mr. Prescott wheeled about, one friend on either side of him.

"Attention! Men, the gentleman on my right is Midshipman David Darrin, United States Navy, and the gentleman on my left, Midshipman Daniel Dalzell, also of the Navy. They are to be treated with all the respect and courtesy due to their rank."

Readers of the "High School Boys' Series" and of the "Annapolis Series" will recall these two splendid young Naval officers, first as High School athletes, and later among the most famous of the midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy.

"But how on earth did a lucky wind come up to blow you out this way?" asked Lieutenant Prescott.

"Good fortune ruled it that we should be assigned to duty on the China station," replied

Midshipman Darrin. "So we're journeying across the continent to San Francisco, on our way. But our orders allowed us time enough to stop over a fortnight on the way. Dick, did you imagine we'd go through Colorado without stopping to see you?"

"Of course not," glowed Lieutenant Prescott. "When did you arrive at Clowdry?"

"Day before yesterday. Ever since then we've been on the way. As soon as we reached the end of the rail part of the journey here we engaged Mr. Sanderson as our guide. While coming along this afternoon we saw something like helio signals flashing in the air. The message was one for help, so we hustled along, our guide piloting. And, from some things I've heard and observed since arrival, Dick, I imagine we got here just about in time."

"As you always did," laughed Lieutenant Prescott. "But, now that I've got my breath back from my delight—Sergeant Overton, what is the meaning of prisoners in camp? And where did you find Hinkey?"

"Didn't you hear quite a lot of firing, sir?" asked Sergeant Hal.

"Firing? Considerable, but I thought some party nearer in had struck such a haul of game as you landed last night, Sergeant. Go on and tell me about it."

This Hal did, and it was all news to the lieutenant, for neither he nor any member of his hunting party had seen the helio signals.

Just as the brief spirited tale was finished the remainder of the hunting party came in, one of them being a private of hospital corps. To this man was entrusted the attending of the injured invaders.

Hinkey fairly cowered before the scorn that was apparent in the eyes of all his former comrades.

The evening meal was now nearly ready. By Hal's direction another table was set up for Lieutenant Prescott and his guests.

Then came the early, cool night. Prescott and his Naval friends sat apart for an hour, talking over the old times. Then, at last, they came over and joined the soldiers.

"May I ask a question, Lieutenant?" inquired Sergeant Hal, saluting.

"Certainly, Sergeant."

"What is to be done with the prisoners?"

"You are in command here, Sergeant."

"But isn't this a greater military matter, sir, than the mere command of a hunting camp?"

"I don't believe I need to take command, Sergeant. But I will offer you a suggestion, if you wish."

"If you will be so kind, sir."

"Why, this general group of prisoners belong to the civil authorities. You will find a jail and a sheriff very near the point where we left the train."

"Yes, sir. And Hinkey?"

"He is a prisoner of the United States Army. You can put him in charge of the same sheriff, asking him to hold Hinkey until a guard from Fort Clowdry arrives to take him. A wire to the post can be sent from the station."

"Very good, sir. Then I think I will detail Sergeant Terry, a driver and a guard of six men to escort the prisoners to the sheriff. The hospital man had better go along, too, and the injured men can travel in the wagon."

"That disposition will do very well, Sergeant. But Sergeant Terry and his men will very likely be away four days altogether."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Saluting, and including the young Naval officers in his salute, Sergeant Overton went over to explain the plan to Noll.

"What very boyish youngsters those two sergeants are," remarked Midshipman Darrin.

"Young, yes, but as seasoned and good men as we have in the company or the regiment," replied Lieutenant Prescott.

"They certainly look like fine soldiers," agreed Midshipman Dalzell.

"They'll look very much like fine young officers, one of these days, or I miss my guess by a mile," answered Prescott. "Colonel North is very proud of these two boys, and so are Major Silsbee and Captain Cortland."

In the morning the three wounded men were placed in one of the two wagons belonging to camp. Though their hands were left free, all three had their feet shackled to staples inside the wagon.

The other five prisoners stood sulkily behind the wagon. Noll assembled the guard at the side of the trail.

"Climb up on the wagon, hospital man," called Noll. "Start ahead, driver. Squad, by twos, right, forward march."

Then the party started out.

Two of the remaining soldiers were detailed for camp, as usual. The other enlisted men went off in a hunting party by themselves.

All except Sergeant Hal. He had been invited to go with Lieutenant Prescott and the latter's friends, and had gladly accepted.

Sanderson, the guide, having been paid by his Naval employers, had already taken the trail.

"I hope you bring us luck, Dave and Dan," announced Lieutenant Prescott, as the party started. "We are still far shy of the amount of game we want to take back to the post."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE UNITED STATES SERVICES FIGHT TOGETHER

FOR more than an hour Midshipman Darrin and Sergeant Overton had been away from the rest of the party, seeking tracks or other signs of wild game.

"Sergeant," spoke Midshipman Darrin, at last, "I hope you won't be offended by the opinion I have formed of you."

"What is that, sir?" asked Hal Overton.

"I've been watching you a bit, and I've come to the conclusion that you're an uncommonly fine and keen soldier."

"Not much chance in that for offense, sir," laughed the boyish sergeant.

"But you're of the Army," said Mr. Darrin, "and I don't know whether you believe that a sailor is a judge of a soldier."

"Quite naturally, sir," laughed Hal, "I am wholly willing to believe in the value of your judgment. And I have another reason."

"What is that, Sergeant?"

"Why, sir, you're a very particular friend of Lieutenant Prescott's, and we men of B company are ready to believe in any one whom Lieutenant Prescott likes."

"You have another very fine fellow for an officer in your regiment," Mr. Darrin went on. "And that is Greg Holmes—pardon me, Lieutenant Holmes. He's as fine, in every way, as Mr. Prescott himself."

"Yes, sir. Lieutenant Holmes is as popular with the men as any officer in the regiment can be."

"You see," smiled Mr. Darrin reminiscently, "when Dalzell, Prescott, Holmes and myself were youngsters—or smaller youngsters than we are now—we were all chums together in the same High School."

Then, finding a ready and appreciative listener Midshipman Darrin plunged into the recounting of many of the former adventures of that famous group of schoolboys once known as Dick & Co., whose doings were fully set forth in the "High School Boys' Series."

Sergeant Hal heard, also, of Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton, the two remaining members of Dick & Co., whose adventures, after leaving school, are now being set forth in the "Young Engineers' Series."

But Overton did not hear about the sweethearts of these former High School chums. Sweethearts were too sacred to be discussed with comparative strangers.

"Now, Prescott informs me that you two

young sergeants intend to work for commissions from the ranks," said Mr. Darrin, after a while.

"Yes, sir; that was our idea in entering the service."

"I hope, heartily, Sergeant Overton, that both you and your friend win out with your ambitions."

"Thank you, sir."

"I have a very particular reason for wishing you that luck," smiled Midshipman Darrin, "and you are at liberty, Sergeant, to ask me what it is."

"Very good, sir."

"I want to see both yourself and Sergeant Terry succeed because I don't believe the service can afford to be without two such unusually good officers as you and Sergeant Terry would make."

Hal flushed, tried to utter his thanks, and found himself confused, for Midshipman Darrin, who was taller, was gazing down at him with a very friendly look in his eyes.

"My hand has been itching for something all day," the young Naval officer went on. "Sergeant, I want to shake hands with you, if you don't mind."

Their hands met in hearty clasp.

"I shall have Prescott keep me posted re-

garding you two young men," went on Dave Darrin. "And, when you two are officers, if you are ever near any craft on which I'm on duty I want you to promise me that you'll come to visit me."

"You know how much delight that would give both Sergeant Terry and myself, sir."

"Attention—to the job!" suddenly muttered Dave Darrin, in a low voice.

Their long tramp had taken them alongside a low ledge.

As Darrin spoke in that low voice he raised his hunting rifle quickly, bringing the butt to his shoulder with a jerk.

He fired—straight at a bear, not more than five feet over their heads and at a total distance of only about ten feet.

But in that same instant the big, brown brute moved, and the bullet intended for his heart merely clipped away a bit of hair at the bottom of the animal's belly.

Bruin's first move had been to get away from danger, but now, at the shot, he became very much angered.

A second, swift leap, and the big animal jumped downward, landing on Midshipman Darrin's chest and bearing him to the earth.

"Lie still, sir!" gasped Sergeant Hal.

There was but a single cartridge in Overton's

"Lie Still, Sir!" Gasped Sergeant Hal.

rifle. He clicked the bolt, then aimed all in a flash.

In his agitation Hal succeeded only in grazing the top of the animal's back.

But Bruin, crouched on Darrin's body, raised his head and turned it snarlingly toward Hal.

Everything that was to be done must be done in a moment. Fortunately, the young sergeant wore his bayonet in scabbard at his belt.

Like a flash Sergeant Overton fixed that bayonet to the muzzle of his rifle, bruin regarding him with a hostile glitter in his eyes, while Midshipman Darrin, whose rifle had been hurled just out of his reach, had the presence of mind to lie utterly still.

"Now, we'll see what you'll do, bruin!" quivered Hal, making a swift lunge for the animal's side.

What bruin did was to leap away from the midshipman's prostrate body. Despite the bear's lumbering body and shambling gait he can be spry enough at need.

Hal's thrust, therefore, failed to land directly, but merely ripped along the animal's coat.

The momentum that followed the miss caused Sergeant Hal Overton to fall forward to his knees. And now the enraged bruin made straight for him.

There was time to do but one thing. Ser-

geant Hal made a lunge direct at the bear's eyes.

With that menace of cold steel before his eyes the bear dodged to one side, then rose to his hind feet.

Rising, Hal took his stand on the defensive, for now bruin was determined on a finish fight.

Straight at Bruin's heart lunged Hal, but it was a game at which two could play.

Bruin's massive left paw, backed by prodigious strength, swept the bayoneted rifle aside, fairly wrenching it from Overton's grasp.

So now the bear was ready, either for embrace or pursuit of this now helpless enemy.

Midshipman Dave Darrin, U. S. N., at the instant when he found the weight of the bulky animal removed from his body, had crawled noiselessly away for a few feet.

Now Darrin dropped to one knee, the rifle at ready. Aiming with the utmost coolness, the young Naval officer fired.

Straight and true went the bullet this time into Bruin's heart.

The big mass swayed, then fell. There was barely a gasp to signal the bear's end of life.

"Sergeant," remarked the midshipman coolly, "your conduct just now fully confirmed what I said about your being a valuable man for the Army."

"I probably wouldn't have been in the Army much longer, sir, if you hadn't got your rifle and fired just as you did," retorted the boyish sergeant.

"And I couldn't have reached my rifle if you hadn't shown the very unusual nerve to try to whip a bear in a bayonet charge."

"I know a good deal better, now, Mr. Darrin, how useless a bayonet attack is against a bear. Though Sergeant Terry and I once made a good haul of bear's meat with bayonets when at too close quarters with bears."

"You'll have to tell me about that as you go along," remarked the young Naval officer.

Noting the locality well, they left the bear where it had fallen, to be taken up a little later.

"Hello, sir. There are other shots from our party," cried Overton, as three rifle reports rang out not far away. "That seems to show, sir, that they're meeting with luck, too."

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

AFTER that, through the days to come, the luck seemed to boom.

At the end of four days young Sergeant Terry and his guard returned, having turned over all the prisoners to the sheriff of Blank County.

Noll had also wired the post at Fort Clowdry, and had received the post adjutant's answer that a guard would be sent to bring Private Hinkey back for trial on the charge of desertion.

"The sheriff knew all the prisoners at once, all except Hinkey," Sergeant Noll reported back to his chum and to Lieutenant Prescott. "The leader of the gang is a half-popular fellow with some classes here in the mountains. Despite the fact that he's a desperado, he is often surprisingly good-natured, and always game when he loses. His name is Griller—Butch Griller, he's called. His crew are called the Moccasin Gang, because Griller has always preferred that his men wear moccasins instead of shoes. Shoes may give out in the wilds, but moccasins can always be made whenever an antelope is killed."

"The Moccasin Gang?" repeated Lieutenant

Prescott. "Why, I've heard stories about that desperate crowd. But what were they doing around our camp?"

"Griller told me about that before we reached town," Sergeant Noll continued. "Griller and his men, it seems, were being pursued by the sheriff of the next county. He trailed them to a cabin where they had stopped and made such a complete surprise that Griller and his gang got away only by jumping through the windows without their arms. Then they traveled fast. When they found that there were soldiers here, the Moccasins hoped that they could get some of our arms and ammunition. Thus provided, they hadn't much doubt of being able to provide themselves with more fighting hardware. And they'd have gotten away, too, if it hadn't been that Butch Griller had promised Hinkey a chance for revenge on Sergeant Overton."

"But how did Hinkey come to be with them?" broke in Lieutenant Prescott.

"Griller told me about that, sir," Noll replied. "Griller said he was standing on the stoop of a house in Denver, near the ball grounds, at the time when Hinkey deserted and made his break to get away. Griller was in Denver, on the quiet, to get more men together. When he saw Hinkey running, he sized him up as a man just deserted, and felt that Hinkey

would be useful to him. So he called to Hinkey, shoved him inside the house, and then, when——"

"Say, but I remember that! And now I recall where I saw Griller before. He told me that Hinkey had rushed on and turned the next street corner below. That threw me off the track," muttered Sergeant Hal.

"Well, his new man Hinkey brought him no luck," laughed Lieutenant Prescott. "And the Moccasins won't do much more harm, unless they manage to break jail."

"I don't believe they'll get away from that sheriff, anyway, sir," remarked Sergeant Noll grimly.

Noll Terry and the members of his guard were in time to do some more hunting before the happy soldiers' holiday came to an end.

When the expedition set out on its return both of the big transport wagons carried all the wild game meat that could be packed into them, and officers' and enlisted men's messes at Fort Clowdry celebrated in joyous fashion.

Ex-Private Hinkey, the deserter, was soon tried by general court-martial, and sentenced to be dismissed from the service, to forfeit all pay and allowances and to serve two years at a military prison.

It was Lieutenant Prescott who gave one of

the crowning sensations just toward the close of Hinkey's trial.

Just before the battalion had left Fort Clowdry to go to the military tournament at Denver, First Sergeant Gray had asked every soldier in B Company to turn in a slip on which was written the name and address of his nearest relative or friend.

As such data was already on file, the men had wondered not a little at the request, but they had complied. And now Lieutenant Prescott informed the members of the court that it had been a ruse of his.

These slips, together with the clumsily printed note that had accompanied the return of Private William Green's money, and also the envelope addressed to Green, which latter Hal had admitted as his writing—all, just before the start of the hunting trip, had been forwarded by Lieutenant Prescott to a famous writing expert in the east.

Word had finally come from the expert to the effect that the envelope had really been addressed by Sergeant Hal, as that young soldier admitted. The printed note to Green, however, had been fashioned, the expert stated positively, by the same man who had turned in the written name and address of the "nearest friend" of ex-Private Hinkey.

With this report the expert had sent a curiously drawn chart showing resemblances between Hinkey's admitted handwriting and the printed note to Green. There were also photographs, made with the aid of the microscope, showing pronounced similarities of little strokes and flourishes that were alike, both in Hinkey's admitted handwriting and in the turns given to some of the letters of the printed note.

Summing up all the evidence, the expert's report stated positively that Hinkey was the one who had fashioned the note to Green.

Finding that he could no longer deny his guilt, Hinkey was finally driven to confession before the court.

He had hated Sergeant (then Corporal) Overton with such an intensity, Hinkey confessed, that he had found himself willing to stop at nothing that would damage the young soldier in any way.

The envelope that Hal had addressed in his own handwriting, it now turned out, was one that he had so addressed at the request of Sergeant Gray to enclose an official communication that Gray had delivered to Private Green some weeks before.

On finding this envelope, and realizing how it would implicate Hal Overton, Hinkey had even gone to the extreme of returning Green's

money, when he might safely have kept and spent it.

The reason why the money had not been found during the search that had immediately followed the discovery of the robbery in the squad room was equally simple. Hinkey, the afternoon before the robbery, had made the discovery of a secret hiding place under the floor beside his cot. That hiding place had been made, at great trouble, by some soldier formerly living in the squad room, and Hinkey's discovery of it had been accidental.

Now that he was in the mood for confessing, Hinkey also described how he had slipped the revolver lightly under Sergeant Hal's blanket in passing Overton's cot.

So the mystery was wholly cleared up at last, and when ex-Private Hinkey departed to begin his term of imprisonment the Army was well rid of one who was in no sense fit to be the comrade of any honest man wearing Uncle Sam's soldier uniform.

Late in the fall the Colorado courts sent Griller and his crew to the penitentiary for long terms.

Immediately after Hinkey's trial, Lieutenant Prescott, who had gone to all the trouble to secure the evidence, drew up a brief statement, setting forth Sergeant Hal Overton's complete

innocence of the squad-room robbery and declaring who the scoundrel was.

This statement was published, by direction of Colonel North, in the orders of the day.

Then, of course—human nature always works this way—even those of the soldiers who had most honestly believed in young Overton's guilt, now swarmed around him to assure him that they had never for an instant believed it possible that he could be otherwise than a most honest and wonderful soldier. Not they! Oh, no! Now that they knew who the real culprit was, these victims of human nature were ready to cross their hearts that they had known all along that Overton was absolutely guiltless; and they had even suspected, all along, who would turn out by and by to be the villain.

As has been said, this is human nature, and therefore not to be sneered at. In fact, nearly all of the men who protested so loudly to Hal Overton had the actual grace to believe themselves—as is always the case.

Private William Green, however, had been cured, ever since the return of most of his money, of the bad habit of carrying so much around with him. Seldom after that was he to be caught with more than a hundred dollars.

To Sergeant Hal it seemed impossible to thank Lieutenant Prescott sufficiently.

For, though the young soldier, even if he had not been vindicated so handsomely, would have lived down most of the suspicion in time, yet all of the stain would never have vanished had it not been for Lieutenant Prescott.

Soldiers, from the very fact of living in isolated little communities of their own, are somewhat prone to gossip over purely garrison and regimental affairs. So some of the story would always have clung about Sergeant Overton's reputation among his own kind.

"But you've stopped all of that forever, Lieutenant," protested Hal gratefully when calling, by permission, at Mr. Prescott's quarters.

"I am glad I have then, my lad," smiled back the young lieutenant. "I'm glad for your sake, Sergeant, and, if you wish, you may consider that I took much of the trouble on your account personally. But I had also a still greater motive in doing what I did."

"What was that, sir, if I may ask?"

"My own love of the service," replied Lieutenant Dick Prescott impressively. "What would the service ever amount to, Sergeant, if we allowed our best, brightest and most loyal men to be downed by suspicions against them that clearly had no base? What honest man would care to enter or to stay in the ranks of the Army if he did not feel sure that his officers

would work to see him righted and enjoying his proper place in the esteem of his comrades. So, Sergeant, don't try too hard to thank me. Whatever I did for you personally, I did it ten times more for the good of the tried, old, true-blue United States Army."

Then, after a pause, Mr. Prescott went on:

"I've had my attention attracted to you more than ever, both yourself and Sergeant Terry. I see even new possibilities in you as soldiers. Do you know why?"

"No, sir."

Lieutenant Prescott laughed lightly, though there was a slight mist in his eyes as he answered:

"It may be news to you, Sergeant, but my good old schoolboy friend, now Mr. Darrin, of the Navy, has taken almost as much of a liking to you two youngsters as though you were pet younger brothers of his. Darrin watched you both often while he was here, after we returned from the hunting trip. He spoke of you frequently, and seemed to have noticed so many excellencies in both yourself and Sergeant Terry that I grew ashamed of my own slight powers of observation. Of course, you don't know anything of the old days when Mr. Darrin, Mr. Dalzell, Mr. Holmes and myself were all devoted chums."

"I think I do, sir," Sergeant Hal rejoined.

"You do? How?"

"Mr. Darrin told me a lot that day he and I spent some hours hunting together. He told me a lot about your old schoolboy days."

"That's only another proof of how much Darrin likes you, then," pursued the young lieutenant warmly. "Darrin isn't usually very talkative with new acquaintances. But what I was going to say was that, back in our schooldays, I often made a great reputation for wisdom just because I accepted Darrin's wise estimates of human nature and people. So now Darrin's praises of you two young sergeants have made me feel that I have missed a lot of what I should have observed about you both."

"Both Terry and myself will feel highly honored over such good opinions of us, sir," Hal replied.

"I wouldn't talk quite so freely if I didn't know that you're both so level-headed that a little praise will make better, instead of worse soldiers of you, Sergeant Overton. Of course, as one of your officers, I understand that both of you young sergeants are working onward and forward with the hope of one day winning commissions in the line of the Army. I wish you every kind of good luck, Overton. Here's my hand on it. And some day I hope to be able

to offer you my hand again—when, wearing the shoulder straps, you come into an officers' mess, somewhere, as a fellow-member of that mess."

"Mr. Darrin made both Terry and myself promise, sir, that if we ever win commissions, we'll visit him on his ship as soon after as possible."

"Mr. Darrin and Mr. Dalzell are on their way to China by this time," continued Lieutenant Prescott. "From the China station their next detail will undoubtedly be the Philippine station. And that's where, after a while, this regiment will be due to go."

And that is just where the Thirty-fourth Regiment did go, as will be discovered in the next volume in this series, which is published under the title: "Uncle Sam's Boys in the Philippines; Or, Following the Flag Against the Moros."

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